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ABSTRACT

Work preparation should provide adequate qualifications for sustained labor market participation and lifelong learning that lead to economic self-sufficiency and positive engagement as family members and citizens. Five barriers to productive transitions confront disadvantaged urban youth: changing structure of employment opportunity; skills mismatches in urban areas; employer discrimination; negative influences of family and neighborhood life; and weaknesses within youth-serving institutions. Ten lessons from research and practice address these barriers: modest interventions have modest and short-lived impacts; second-class systems yield second-class results; traditional didactic teaching methods fail significant numbers of young people; work is a powerful motivator and catalyst for learning when provided in a supportive, learning-rich context; a strong, direct connection to the local labor market and its employers is critical; work preparation strategies must take into account young people's developmental needs; strong relationships with competent, caring adults are essential; impacts of program design on different population subgroups vary greatly; quality of implementation matters greatly; and results take time. Priorities for the future are strategies to address the economic and social landscape of opportunity, improve the design and delivery of skill-related interventions, and improve community-level partnerships. (Contains 208 references.) (YLB)

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Both Sides Now:

*New Directions in
Promoting Work
and Learning for
Disadvantaged Youth*

*Written by
Richard Kazis and
Hilary Kopp*

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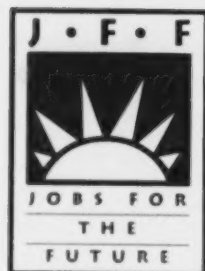
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Both Sides Now: New Directions in Promoting Work and Learning for Disadvantaged Youth

A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation

**by Richard Kazis and Hilary Kopp
Jobs for the Future**



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E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

The mission of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is "to improve life outcomes for disadvantaged children and families." In pursuing this goal, the Foundation has become increasingly aware of the need to address more directly the underlying causes of the poverty that human and social service systems seek to ameliorate.

Historically, strategies to address poverty in the United States have taken two distinct approaches. The dominant approach has focused on the supply side of the labor market—the skills and other characteristics of the poor. The less common approach has focused on the demand side of the labor market—the characteristics of firms and industries and their wage and hiring practices. This view emphasizes the great dependence of earnings upon the jobs and industries to which workers have access.

Refusing to choose between these two approaches, the Casey Foundation has made a commitment to exploring strategies that address both sides of the labor market simultaneously. As part of this effort, the Foundation asked *Jobs for the Future* to help its staff think about the range of policies and practices which, if better coordinated and implemented, might help young people succeed in the labor market and in life. This report culminates that effort. In the following pages, we:

- Define what "work preparation" requires in today's competitive economy;
- Identify five interrelated barriers to success facing young people, particularly disadvantaged urban youth;
- Review the lessons from research and practice on strategies to address those barriers;
- Highlight innovative strategies for helping to improve both the landscape of economic and social opportunities within which young people choose their futures and the skills and abilities young people need to succeed in the labor market today; and
- Recommend priorities for the field and for funders, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in this redefined arena of work preparation.

Our concern is primarily with those in greatest need. Three groups in particular have seen their career prospects worsen in recent decades and are experiencing serious problems in the labor market: high school dropouts; high school graduates (or those who earned a General Equivalency Diploma) who have not continued their education; and in-school youth who are likely to drop out or end their formal education without a postsecondary credential.

Work Preparation and its Place in a Jobs and Income Strategy

The focus of this report is *work preparation*. There is little question that any effort to increase access to employment and income for young people must emphasize effective strategies for improving individuals' preparedness for careers and working life. But what does that really mean? What kinds of interventions and approaches are likely to be most successful in helping disadvantaged urban youth?

Traditionally, work preparation has been defined narrowly, referring primarily to vocational skill development. In this report, the term is redefined and broadened in two important ways. First, work preparation is defined to incorporate the academic, technical, and employability skills that are increasingly in demand in today's economy. In this report, we define the goal of work preparation as *to provide adequate preparation and qualifications for sustained labor market participation and lifelong learning so that all young people can move toward economic self-sufficiency and positive engagement as family members and citizens*. Second, work preparation strategies, particularly in urban areas, cannot succeed if they focus solely on the skills and characteristics of individuals entering the labor market. Policy and practice must address the multiple and interrelated barriers to success facing many young people—*barriers on both the demand and the supply sides of the labor market, many of which are beyond the control of young people themselves*.

To a great extent, the process of becoming ready to enter the world of work is synonymous with healthy development into adulthood. In healthy communities, preparation for entering the adult world of careers and responsibility appears to be a natural, almost effortless part of growing up. In disadvantaged communities, however, the institutions of family and community are weaker, under greater stress, and less equipped to provide the knowledge, skills, guidance, role models, or experiences that make it easier for young people to get and keep a job, and to advance in a career. In these communities, work preparation strategies must be consciously designed to provide the kinds of opportunities and experiences that fortunate youth take for granted as part of everyday life.

The challenge facing the Casey Foundation and others trying to improve the work preparation of disadvantaged young people involves finding ways to strengthen local institutions and their interactions so that youth in these environments have more of the opportunities, services, and supports—in terms of work experience, education and skill development, and adult relationships and connections—that are available in healthier communities.

Barriers to Productive Transitions for Disadvantaged Urban Youth

What researchers have called a "web of mutually reinforcing circumstances and behaviors" traps individuals and whole communities in joblessness. Understanding this web of circumstances requires an assessment of both *barriers on the demand side* (opportunities for employment and earnings) and *barriers on the supply side* (the characteristics of individual workers), as well as the complex *connections between the two* (conditions among the institutions that can help improve the match between available work and potential workers).

Five barriers, in particular, confront disadvantaged urban youth as they engage the world around them and make choices about their future:

- 1. The changing structure of employment opportunity is both the backdrop and the starting point for understanding the deterioration of the labor market prospects of less-educated urban youth.**

The overriding fact of urban economic life over the past two decades has been the deterioration of labor market opportunities for disadvantaged residents, young and old. As the economy has changed, propelled by new technologies and increasingly competitive product markets, the mix of industries and occupations in the economy has shifted. Manufacturing employment has shrunk; service employment has grown significantly. In addition, jobs have continued to move out of cities into suburbs and exurbs. These trends, which show no sign of reversing, have made it more difficult for less-skilled urban youth to find decent-paying employment. They have depressed employment and earnings considerably for less-educated and minority youth.

2. **There is growing evidence of important skills mismatches in urban areas—particularly at the low end of the labor market. These mismatches keep an increasing proportion of young black and Hispanic urban dwellers from successfully entering the labor market.**

Growing evidence suggests that important skills mismatches have developed in urban areas—particularly at the low end of the labor market—and that these mismatches keep an increasing proportion of disadvantaged young urban residents from successfully entering the labor market. For young urban dwellers who have never completed high school, the lack of an educational credential, and the basic skills associated with it, presents a serious obstacle to employment and career advancement. Job prospects are not much better for those who have completed high school, in part because many urban high school graduates lack the skills and work experience that employers seek: 60 percent of twelfth graders, for example, cannot perform at basic math proficiency levels. This mismatch is one reason why the vacancy rates are higher and longer for jobs in the central city, despite the large pool of unemployed residents in inner-city neighborhoods.

The mismatch between the demands of employers and the skills of a significant percentage of urban youth is one reason why job vacancy rates are higher and longer in the central city, despite the large pool of unemployed residents in many urban neighborhoods. In an economy based increasingly on services, knowledge, and information, employer demand for a variety of skills—from the ability to deal with customers or use computers to skills in arithmetic, reading, and writing—is high and increasing, even in relatively low-skill jobs. The evidence is growing that employers expect and require different and more complex skills from entry-level workers.

For young urban dwellers who have never completed high school, the lack of an educational credential and the basic skills associated with it presents a serious obstacle to employment and career advancement. Job prospects are not much better for those who have completed high school, in part because many urban high school graduates lack the skills and work experience that employers seek.

3. **Discrimination by employers has had a negative effect on urban youth employment and earnings, particularly for African-American males.**

Bias against certain groups depresses the demand for those groups in the labor market. In today's job market, employer behaviors and attitudes towards young people pose a serious obstacle to many young people's ability to advance toward a career. There is evidence that growing employer concerns about the skills, behaviors, and attitudes of young minority men have weakened demand for their labor, even while overall employment discrimination appears to be declining. Harsh judgments of young African-American (and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic) men are especially widespread and are a factor in job recruitment, hiring, and retention.

4. **In distressed communities, negative influences arising from family and neighborhood life often complicate the efforts of young urban residents to succeed.**

Strong family, peer, and neighborhood relationships can help youth build the confidence, motivation, and trust in others they need to succeed. However, the reverse is also true. Barriers to work preparation and employment can be created or exacerbated by an individual's negative experiences in the labor market, the negative experiences of family members, and living and relating to peers and adults in a neighborhood isolated from the mainstream of economic activity.

In more distressed neighborhoods, these influences are more likely to reinforce negative attitudes and behaviors than to neutralize them. When sufficiently concentrated, widespread unemployment and underemployment contribute to a community's economic and social disorganization. These effects, in turn, can lead to deeper and more debilitating poverty and joblessness that becomes more intractable and debilitating over time and across generations. Attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors harden in ways that economic market signals cannot overcome easily.

5. **Weaknesses within youth-serving institutions, plus the lack of coordination and strategic alliances among them, often stymie the efforts of youth to overcome adversity and to use community resources to their advantage.**

Schools, informal youth organizations, community-based employment and training providers, and churches are among the places where youth can learn with and from adults and each other. But if these institutions are weak and ineffective, either singly or as a system, many young people will continue to be mired in failure, frustration, and poor performance in the labor market.

Such weaknesses are often significant. The problem is not a lack of will or desire among those who work with young people. Nor is the lack of impressive program models the primary obstacle. Rather, youth-serving professionals and individual programs operate within institutions, bureaucracies, and service-delivery systems that are embattled and deeply troubled. Several problems surface again and again: fragmented services, uncoordinated funding streams, and conflicting regulations; inadequate resources for responsive, effective service delivery; and insufficient training and development opportunities for youth-serving staff.

Lessons from Research and Practice: What Works?

Research and practice provide some important guidance on strategies to overcome these five work preparation challenges facing many urban youth. Although the research base is uneven and less conclusive than one would want, there is a growing consensus among researchers and practitioners on promising approaches to addressing both the skill development needs and the landscape of opportunity facing urban young people.

Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Employment Opportunities and Economic Development

While rigorous research on the effectiveness of targeted economic development programs is almost non-existent, several lessons emerge from the experience of the past few decades. First, reaching any significant degree of scale in job creation will require a variety of approaches which not only include self-employment and microenterprise development, but also emphasize business retention, small-business expansion, and limited business recruitment. Second, economic development efforts are more likely to benefit low-income individuals when they are targeted to industries where the demand for entry and other sub-baccalaureate level jobs is high.

Three other conclusions can be drawn from past practice in local economic development. Resources should be targeted to businesses and industries that export goods and services outside the community, since they have the potential to generate more local jobs than do retail activities. Similarly, economic development strategies must look beyond neighborhood boundaries to the opportunities in and the dynamics of the regional economy, so that job- and resource-poor urban communities can benefit from the regional engines of job growth and not be forced to generate wealth and opportunity internally. Finally, strong and savvy community-based organizations are needed to advocate for and serve as intermediaries for local residents if urban neighborhoods and their residents are to benefit significantly from local economic development efforts.

Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Families and Neighborhoods

The most effective family-strengthening policies for the poor would be policies that increase family members' employment and earnings. In general, though, family-strengthening programs—including family support, family preservation, and teen parenting—focus on providing assistance to parents so they can better cope with stress, help their children develop, and keep their families together.

Family support programs help parents form functional and emotional attachments to other parents with the goal of improving their own parenting skills and their ability to find employment. Innovative programs help parents develop personal networks that enable them to solve family problems and increase family cohesion. *Family preservation programs* address the challenges facing parents who risk losing their children to foster care or other supervised placements. Evaluations of these interventions yield no firm conclusions on effectiveness. Both these strategies appear to be more common and more effective for families with young children than for those with adolescents.

Teen-parenting initiatives, by design, are comprehensive efforts to deal with the many hurdles standing between teen mothers and self-sufficiency. Evidence of the effectiveness of these programs is inconclusive. One carefully evaluated program produced moderately better outcomes after five years on measures

that included employment, welfare receipt, and parenting skills; the 18-month impacts of another program targeting a more disadvantaged group of teen parents found little progress after eighteen months on most outcomes.

In recent years, foundations frustrated with the fragmented approaches and small-scale impacts of strategies to improve the economic well-being of urban neighborhoods and their residents have seeded a new generation of initiatives. Known as *comprehensive community initiatives*, these comprehensive approaches to neighborhood-building are designed to combine, coordinate, and achieve synergies among various community-level systems and program interventions: social services and supports, health care, mental health, job training, leadership development.

While the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives poses great challenges, early assessments emphasize that the best ones combine activities in the social, economic, and physical spheres. Other lessons from researchers and practitioners highlight the following principles: "community building" and community participation play a critical role; poor communities need financial, political, and technical resources that lie outside the community; activities in both the private and nonprofit sectors must complement improvements in public-sector support systems; and change requires sustained investment over a long period of time.

Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Employer Attitudes and Behaviors

Efforts to change employer attitudes and behaviors regarding certain employee groups have primarily been of two kinds: those generated by employers themselves and those pressed upon employers by adversarial community groups.

Employers have acquired significant experience with efforts to value and promote diversity through training for management, supervisors, and front-line workers. While little evaluation has been done of these interventions, the business community apparently believe the results are worth the price. A healthy industry has emerged that provides businesses with consulting services on the legal, management, and interpersonal issues associated with bias in recruiting, hiring, and management.

The second approach is typically more confrontational: community pressure on employers to hire from certain neighborhoods, or give hiring preference to black or other ethnic groups. Examples include campaigns to require employers on government-funded public works projects to give hiring preference to local residents or public pressure on individual firms (e.g., Coca-Cola, Texaco) to change their hiring practices. Some organizations have conducted or sponsored "hiring audits" to dramatize racial disparities in the hiring practices of local employers. Again, little evaluation has been done on these interventions.

Traditional youth employment or youth development programs have only slight experience with strategies to increase employer sensitivity to young people from different groups, or for altering employer practices through dialogue and education. Programs that link schools with employers and provide work experience for participating young people have generated training opportunities for supervisors and human resource professionals that begin to address employer attitudes and behaviors. There is experiential evidence of changes in the attitudes of managers in participating firms; however, systematic evaluations have yet to emerge.

Work Preparation Strategies: Ten Lessons from Research and Practice

In comparison to other fields, employment and training initiatives for the disadvantaged have a rich tradition of rigorous evaluation research. While the popular assessment of these studies is that "nothing works," this is a misreading of the evidence. Moreover, when combined with insights from practitioners in the field, the literature on both youth employment and school-based, career-oriented education programs yields important "do's and don'ts" for the design and delivery of work preparation efforts for young people and adults.

A consensus is emerging, based on evidence from programs and policies over the past thirty years. This consensus can be summarized in ten lessons that should inform the next generation of work preparation policy and practice. At the top of the list are two overarching conclusions:

- **Modest interventions are likely to have modest and short-lived impacts on people's lives and their ability to succeed in the labor market.**

Because of funding constraints and political pressures to spread limited resources to reach more participants, youth employment and training programs tend to be relatively short and isolated interventions, lacking continuity of service or comprehensiveness. Common sense, as well as research, argues that effective youth programming—both in-school and out-of-school—must be intensive, continuous, and varied.

- **Second-class systems yield second-class results.**

The youth employment and training system in this country has often been called the "second-chance" system. However, it has tended too often to be a "second-class system," with standards of achievement too low to impart adequate skills and to win employer support. Programs for in-school and out-of-school youth must aim toward the same long-term goal: mastery of challenging academic standards and career-related competencies that enable all participants to advance and succeed in both postsecondary education and career employment. This requires all learning and work preparation programs to be part of a linked system of opportunities that can help individuals move progressively and sequentially toward credentials with value in the labor market.

A second group of findings relates to pedagogy—to teaching methods that hold promise as core elements of learning programs for disadvantaged youth.

- **Traditional didactic teaching methods fail significant numbers of young people, in particular many students from disadvantaged, minority, and immigrant households.** More and more education and training reformers agree on the motivational power of active learning that emphasizes an individual's own experiences and provides opportunities for students to discover, create, explore, and find meaning through self-directed efforts. For those who have had difficulties in traditional learning settings, active, experiential instructional and learning methods can be powerful aids to the development of confidence and competence.

- **Work is a powerful motivator and catalyst for learning and effort when provided in a supportive, learning-rich context. Work experience and academic rigor must be combined if work-based learning is to be of maximum benefit to young people.** This conclusion reflects findings from research and practice on the limitations of strategies that focus on either one or the other and from suggestive results of efforts to integrate the two in adult learning, school-to-work programs, and other school- and community-based youth initiatives.

A third set of lessons revolves around basic design principles for improving program effectiveness. Successful programs tend to emphasize: a close connection to the labor market; attention to the developmental needs of different age groups; and the central importance of relationships with competent, caring adults.

- **A strong, direct connection to, and understanding of, the local labor market and its employers is critical.** In the past, there has been too little direct interaction and sharing between youth-serving organizations and the employers they hope will hire their students or clients. The better acquainted the staff of schools and community-based organizations are with the dynamics of the local labor market, the growing and contracting of employment sectors, the needs of local employers, and the organizations that represent employers in the regional economy, the more effective programs are likely to be in preparing young people for work and careers.

- **Work preparation strategies must take into account the developmental needs of young people and provide activities and services that address those needs.** Even the most world-weary youths are working their way, at their own speed, with their own advances and retreats, through a natural developmental process with physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Programs will be more effective at motivating and retaining participants if they are customized to appeal to the priorities and needs of the particular age group they serve.

- **Strong relationships with competent, caring adults are essential.** Young people, particularly those who have had few positive role models in their families or communities, need help learning to make, maintain, and use such relationships. The research on this point is powerful: the specifics of program design can vary greatly, provided that meaningful and reliable adult relationships are a central program element.

Finally, three deceptively simple, yet quite important, implementation lessons emerge from research and practice.

- **The impacts of program design on different population subgroups vary greatly, with males tending to benefit less than females from past efforts.** Because of different pressures and assessments of relative costs and benefits of participation, male and female participants tend to differ in their response to particular program designs. Programs should consider customization to address the different life situations, needs, attitudes, and goals of participating males and females.
- **Quality of implementation matters greatly.** Research has shown that efforts to replicate the same program in different communities can have wildly different outcomes, depending upon the quality of implementation. For this reason, opportunities for quality staff development cannot be overemphasized.
- **It takes time for results to appear.** Research has found that, for some work preparation programs, positive outcomes did not begin to emerge until several years after participation. For young people, in particular, changes in attitudes and behaviors can lag significantly. Issues of trust are critically important to motivation and performance. Moreover, because of the nature of the youth labor market, employment and economic outcomes may not appear until their transition is made to the adult labor market.

Priorities for the Field—and for Funders

Despite the apparent consensus on directions for future efforts, the fact remains that most work preparation programs targeted to urban youth have had disappointing results. For most participants,

these interventions have done little to advance their educational credentials or earnings, or to change their life prospects. Where bright spots exist, they are small, unique, driven by exceptional leaders, and often sustained with extraordinary funding.

This should surprise no one. Most workforce preparation strategies for disadvantaged young people have been doomed from the start, plagued by serious constraints and shortcomings. They have tended to be too modest, short-term, and discontinuous. And they have tended to focus on a limited range of skill deficiencies, underestimating the importance of the other barriers to success that cannot be overcome by efforts to change the characteristics of individuals.

Based on the research and practical wisdom summarized above, we believe that the next generation of work preparation interventions targeted to urban youth will have to be broadened in two ways. First, supply-side efforts will have to be linked to strategies that address the other components of the “web of mutually reinforcing circumstances and behaviors” that make labor market success difficult. Second, supply-side approaches must themselves reach beyond narrowly-defined skill-building curricula, delivered with traditional classroom methods, to incorporate lessons from research and practice on the power of experiential pedagogy, work experience, and connections to adults. Fortunately, there are some guideposts from existing practice. Innovations will be required in three broad arenas: (1) strategies that address the economic and social landscape of opportunity facing urban youth; (2) strategies to improve the design and delivery of skill-related interventions; and (3) strategies for improving community-level partnerships that can help link demand-side and supply-side approaches into a coherent system of opportunities, services, and supports.

Strategies that Address the Economic and Social Landscape of Opportunity

Job creation, access, and quality: In the absence of a major public employment program, relatively modest demand-side strategies have shown some promise, such as strategies that encourage business formation, particularly in industry sectors that are growing

regionally and generate relatively well-paying entry-level jobs, and transportation strategies that get inner-city residents to where the jobs are in the suburban area. Other promising strategies include aggressive local hiring agreements with employers, particularly on government-funded development projects; employment-brokering services that reduce employer costs for recruitment, screening, and hiring while providing workers with guidance and support to get and hold a job; leveraging employment opportunities that still exist in low-income neighborhoods, including medical, social, and human service jobs; and enriching existing jobs so they can serve as stepping stones to higher skill employment.

Employer attitudes and behaviors: Despite much rhetoric, relatively little attention has been paid to strategies to engage employers in meaningful work-related relationships with urban youth, both in-school and out-of-school. Nevertheless, at least three approaches appear promising: (1) lessening the costs and risks for employers (through the strengthening of intermediary organizations that can aggregate employer interests and reduce their individual costs); (2) targeting receptive employer groups, including those with entry- and technician-level labor shortages, employers of teenage workers, and minority-owned firms; and (3) changing employer perceptions and biases about young people, particularly minority males, through approaches such as creation of a diversity management "extension service" for small and medium-sized businesses, dialogue among employers and minority males, post-placement follow-up services that help new workers adjust to workplace realities, and studies of hiring practices to raise community and employer awareness.

Strategies to Improve the Design and Delivery of Skill-Related Interventions

Given the weakened demand for low-skill labor across the economy and in cities in particular, supply-side strategies to improve the skills of urban youth are critically important. Such interventions must become more rigorous to match changing employer demand—and they must address not simply technical training for specific jobs but also basic academic preparation in literacy, numeracy, and computer skills, and, importantly, socialization and motivation.

In our field research for this study, we found that successful work preparation programs serving disadvantaged in-school and out-of-school youth embrace a common set of design principles and incorporate them in their programs. These principles include the centrality of work-based learning, an active and experiential pedagogy, an emphasis on youth development, strong relationships with adults and peers, support that is consistent and effective over time, and rigorous standards that both postsecondary institutions and employers respect.

At the same time, many challenges remain if the urban population's most at-risk youth are to be adequately served by supply-side education and work preparation efforts. Two deserve special attention: (1) the need for more effective linkages between the second-chance and mainstream education system, and (2) the need to develop strategies, initiatives, and supports targeted to young men of color.

Linking the second-chance and mainstream education systems: Ultimately, reform efforts will have to tackle the systemic challenge of creating and strengthening the links between the second-chance and the mainstream educational systems. This reintegrated system would not require individual programs to converge in their length, academic rigor, content, or target population. It *would* require them to specify where they lead—that is, to identify the next rungs on the ladder. And it would require collaboration among a diverse set of institutions (including firms, unions, community-based organizations, and schools), specifying expectations about the content and quality of programs feeding to higher rungs.

Targeting efforts to young males of color: The evidence is unequivocal: young urban males of color confront a particularly complex set of obstacles to development and advancement in school, work, and family life, and they are falling behind in the economic race to succeed. Strategies to improve the economic and social well-being of urban children and families must pay special attention to the challenges faced by this group.

Staff from programs visited for this study consistently emphasized two obstacles to their ability to serve minority males effectively. One is the shortage

of resources. The other is engaging young men enough to attract them to, and keep them attending, work preparation programs. Our research identified several ways to make participation more attractive: combine earning and learning, provide role models from the community, prepare young males of color to deal with workplace culture, and provide access to support networks beyond those traditionally available in work preparation programs.

Implications for Community Partnerships and Local Governance

To move in the directions advocated in this report requires new approaches to planning and governing local anti-poverty efforts. The supply-side proposals require new partnerships among employers, educational institutions, and training providers. Demand-side efforts addressing the "landscape of opportunity" for youth require the engagement of additional interests—economic development agencies, banks and other sources of capital, public housing authorities, and the range of local and regional employers. To provide new economic opportunities, skill development services, and supports that can help the most at-risk populations participate fully in these options will require new and more comprehensive forums for community collaboration and coordination.

This area requires much experimentation, for there is a very thin experience base with such complex organizational forums and planning and governance structures. Whatever the ultimate form of these initiatives, community efforts to improve young people's work preparation will have to solve several collaborative challenges. For example, it will be necessary to identify the key constituencies that must be engaged, along with efficient, inclusive approaches to bringing them to the table. A common vision will need to be crafted for work preparation and how it links to other efforts to help young people and their families succeed. Other design priorities include: building the capacity of local actors to plan community-wide partnerships; specifying and coordinating a continuum of services; creating an accountability system to ensure that all young people have access to information and services that can help them advance; and finding ways to overcome the limitations of categorical funding streams and turf battles.

Priorities for Strategic Grantmaking

Given this ambitious, but necessary, agenda, what should be the priorities of funders such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation? The answer to this question must take into account not only the state of the field, as assessed above, but also the current political moment.

This report is written at a time of great change in American politics and policies. The federal welfare system has been replaced by grants to the states built around time limits and work requirements. Federal employment and training dollars, particularly for at-risk youth, have suffered significant cuts. Programs and funds that were once directed at the federal level are devolving to the states.

Many state and local policymakers and practitioners look to the future with trepidation, fearing reduced resources, heightened turf wars, and less effective services. Yet, there is guarded hope that a more locally responsive, coherent, and effective system might ultimately emerge.

This moment provides a chance to redesign basic operating assumptions that have guided education and employment and training initiatives for disadvantaged youth—to think systemically and not just programmatically. It is a moment when incremental program innovation is insufficient. What is needed is a long-term public campaign for youth.

In such a campaign, philanthropic organizations can play a catalytic leadership role. A long-term, strategic foundation initiative can contribute significantly in four areas: public engagement, public policy, research, and local practice. In an era of increasingly scarce public resources, it would be preferable for such an effort to be launched and promoted collaboratively by a group of influential national foundations that are already committed to improving the prospects of disadvantaged youth and families.

Public Engagement: Foundations can help alter the public discourse around poor youth and their economic prospects through concerted public engagement and media campaigns, convenings of decision and opinion makers, publications, and new research agendas. They can work both to change public perceptions about young people and to change the way youth problems are defined.

Public Policy: Increasingly, the ability of localities to innovate and to serve urban youth will depend on guidance, resources, and restrictions from state officials. To help protect the promising policy innovations of the past and to advance new directions for the future, foundations should encourage efforts that address national and state level policies simultaneously. On the one hand, foundations should promote a compelling national vision and role in the area of youth work preparation policy. One way to do this would be to create and convene an influential forum whose charge would be to develop a new policy consensus. In addition, though, foundations should encourage efforts to monitor and shape state-level policies that have an impact on both the career options and the skill development opportunities available to less advantaged urban youth. Foundations must insist that their funds continue to leverage innovation and improvement, not substitute for base support from the public sector.

Research on Practice and Policy: Credible arguments for resources and policies cannot be made to the public, policymakers, or ourselves without better definitions of success, and clearer explanations of why some interventions are more effective than others. Foundations should continue to promote knowledge development and more strategic use of existing research on program outcomes, community-level change, and the impact on individuals and communities of different social policy innovations.

The Quality and Impact of Local Practice: At the local level, foundations must continue to encourage and promote "visions of the possible" that can motivate innovators across the country and provide evidence for policymakers that new approaches can work. Foundation support should be targeted to both program improvement and systemic reform.

- Program support can provide venture capital for innovative programs that embody the principles highlighted in this study. Foundations should encourage efforts that define skill-development approaches broadly and strengthen the links between supply-side and demand-side approaches to improving youth employment and earnings.
- Systemic support is needed because individual, isolated programs can only accomplish so much. To reach any significant scale, local actors need help designing mechanisms for effective collaboration and comprehensive approaches to urban and community revitalization.

It will be a long journey from where we as a nation are today to a time when policy and practice in the preparation of disadvantaged urban youth for economic success approaches the vision in this report. Yet, the map toward that future is becoming clear—as are the priority targets of opportunity for both the field and for funders. Jobs for the Future hopes that this report helps the Annie E. Casey Foundation and others move productively toward creating a better future for our nation's most disadvantaged youth and young adults.

The Role of Work Preparation in Improving the Life Outcomes of Disadvantaged Children and Families

The mission of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is "to improve life outcomes for disadvantaged children and families." For many years, the Foundation pursued this mission through efforts to reform human service systems and programs that increase the empowerment of, and participation by, people living in poor communities. In the course of this work, the Foundation became increasingly aware of the need to broaden its grantmaking strategies to address more directly the underlying causes of the poverty that human and social service systems seek to ameliorate. In response, the Foundation established an Income, Opportunity, and Work Domain to focus on the lack of access to jobs or opportunities for income in poor neighborhoods and for many poor individuals and families.

An expanded focus on jobs and income is appropriate in today's economy as young people have more and more difficulty succeeding in the labor market. During the 1970s, 62 percent of Americans between the ages of 22 and 26 saw their earnings increase, while only about one in ten experienced a decline, according to the National Commission on Employment Policy. In the 1980s, however, individuals of those ages fared much worse: the earnings of only 42 percent increased during the decade, and they dropped for one in four (Rose 1995). Brookings Institution economist Barry Bosworth has concluded: "To the extent that widening of the distribution of income has occurred, it really is true among the younger people rather than the older, and younger people have borne the brunt of the changes" (Bradsher 1995).

Three groups in particular have suffered: youth with less formal education; men of color; and men of color living in larger cities or in the declining industrial regions of the Northeast and Midwest (Bound and Freeman 1992). This paper is about what can be done to help these groups improve their chances of becoming productive, self-sufficient contributors to the economy and to society.

Historically, strategies to address poverty in the United States have taken two distinct approaches. The dominant approach to poverty, especially since the 1960s, has focused on the supply side of the labor market (i.e., the characteristics of the poor). This is consistent with strong currents in American thought about opportunity and poverty. As a nation, we tend to see opportunity as a matter of individual initiative, as less class-bound than our European counterparts. And Americans of all income groups maintain an abiding belief in the ability of education and training to equalize opportunity and help individuals lift themselves out of poverty: those who "improve" themselves can rise.

The flip side of this deep-seated belief is the view that poverty results from individual circumstances—inadequate skills, poor attitudes, bad luck—and from

inequities in the educational system rather than the economic system. As a result, public policy has frequently distinguished between the deserving and the undeserving poor based on a person's willingness to work. Labor market interventions for the poor have focused primarily on education and training, equality of educational opportunity, and the acquisition of skills and human capital.¹

The less common approach has focused on the demand side of the labor market—the characteristics of firms and industries and their wage and hiring practices. Especially influential in the 1950s, this view emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of available jobs, not of workers, in the determination of individual earnings.

In 1995, the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched a six-city Jobs Initiative that emphasizes this side of the labor market—the structure of employment and its availability to disadvantaged youth and families. This ambitious effort is designed to promote experimentation with, and learning from, different ways to improve the functioning of labor markets for disadvantaged urban job seekers. The Foundation is investing more than \$30 million over eight years to help local stakeholders in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Seattle develop new partnerships and strategies. The emphasis is multifaceted: to support innovative projects that address different labor market barriers and opportunities; to encourage a civic agenda around jobs for inner-city residents; to connect these efforts to social service systems reform; and to develop a policy agenda for taking the demonstration to scale.

In designing the Jobs Initiative, the Casey Foundation recognized that the labor market has changed most dramatically in recent years on the demand side (i.e., in the availability of and access to relatively well-paying full-time jobs). As a result of technological change, deregulation, and increased competition in product markets, the demand for the labor of less-educated youth and young adults has declined significantly. The employment and earnings options

of inner-city workers are both more limited and more demanding today than in the past.

At the same time, the Foundation understands that real barriers exist on the supply side as well. For many less-educated and less-skilled workers, labor market disadvantage results from a complex combination of demand and supply factors—the availability of employment opportunities and the characteristics of those seeking employment. Too many urban youth are indeed held back by: poor academic preparation; little or no work experience; inadequate social, communications, and technical skills; attitudes and behaviors that “work” on the street but not in employment settings; incarceration or involvement with the justice system; and isolation from adult role models who could foster and sustain their work and career aspirations and motivation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has made a commitment to exploring strategies that refuse to choose between these two approaches and instead address both the supply and demand sides of the labor market simultaneously—and the ways in which they connect to the daily lives of individuals and their communities. How well can the two approaches to improving employment and income be reconciled? What would a more nuanced set of strategies look like? These questions are particularly pressing in an era when public policies on work, welfare, and education and training are in great flux and low regard—and when the needs of less-educated individuals and their families are so acute.

As a complement to the background work that led to the Jobs Initiative, the Casey Foundation asked Jobs for the Future to help its staff think about strategies for improving the work preparation of disadvantaged urban youth. Jobs for the Future has focused on a number of questions that could assist the Foundation, including: What is the appropriate role for work preparation efforts in a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy? How can supply-side and demand-side approaches to the labor market for less-educated urban youth be linked? What does

¹ An exception is the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which acknowledges the serious deterioration of earnings among not just those who cannot find work but also many who work full-time. In general, though, Americans tend to believe that you can make it if you work.

experience teach about promising directions for change for both in-school and out-of-school populations? What options should the Foundation consider in planning future initiatives?

This report culminates that effort. In the following pages, we:

- Provide a general introduction to the issues and challenges in this complex field;
- Examine the barriers facing young people in general and certain subgroups in particular;
- Review the research literature on strategies to improve the work preparation of urban youth;
- Highlight a number of innovative efforts to grapple with providing young people the opportunities and skills they need to succeed in today's changing economy; and
- Recommend directions for the Casey Foundation to explore as it maps its grantmaking agenda for improving the employment and income prospects of disadvantaged children, families, and communities.

Easy, ready-made answers do not exist. This is a difficult, challenging time. The economic prospects of a significant proportion of the nation's youth and families continue to deteriorate, and they continue to intensify in increasingly desperate and disconnected neighborhoods. The forces driving these changes are complex and powerful, and unlikely to be reversed in the near term. Moreover, the credibility of the public sector to solve intractable problems of poverty and inequality is at a low point. Indeed, existing programs and ways of organizing education and training, particularly for the least advantaged, have had disappointing impacts. Issues of scale, funding, and public support for comprehensive, long-term efforts continue to vex practitioners and policymakers alike, even though the research literature and the experience of practitioners in the field point to important principles and lessons for building a system that might have more success in helping young people advance in an increasingly inhospitable economic world.

This much is certain. Strategies for helping disadvantaged youth advance and succeed need a rethinking for today's economic and political landscape. This will take time. And it will require concerted efforts

in terms of local practice, state and national policy, and public engagement. It will require groups and institutions and constituencies—local, state, and national—to join a dialogue with those they may have long ignored. New alliances involving schools, businesses, community-based organizations, local governments, police departments, and others will have to form around designing and implementing new solutions. Foundations will have to rethink their role in stimulating and promoting reform, while federal and state governments do the same.

For the Casey Foundation, this period presents a challenge and an opportunity. The instability and uncertainty in both the economy and the political landscape make it difficult to decide how best to target limited resources and leverage maximum public and private investment and involvement. At the same time, this changing environment creates an opportunity to play a catalytic role in shaping debate, research, practice, and policy on the intertwined issues of employment, income, and work preparation for disadvantaged youth. The Casey Foundation can use this moment to help the nation move toward more rational, responsive, comprehensive, and effective approaches to helping young people escape poverty and successfully enter the adult world of career, family, and citizenship.

Work Preparation and its Place in a Jobs and Income Strategy

The focus of this report is work preparation. It starts from the view that effective strategies for improving preparedness for careers and working life are central to any effort to increase access to employment and income for young people. But what does that mean? And what priority should a community initiative to improve income and opportunity give to work preparation strategies?

Our argument has two dimensions. First, we emphasize the importance of addressing work preparation not in isolation but in the context of strategies to lower the multiple barriers that keep many urban youth from succeeding—barriers that operate on both the demand and the supply sides of the labor market, barriers that are economic, social, and psychological. The metaphor of "multiple dams" is useful (Steuerle 1996). Imagine a series of dams holding back water

from a drought-stricken community. Open the floodgates of one dam but leave others downstream closed, and the community will see little improvement. That does not mean that the floodgates of the first dam do not need opening; rather, several dams must be opened simultaneously. This is the case with work preparation strategies for young people. While the structure of employment opportunities must be "opened," so, too, must the educational and skill preparation of many urban youth.

Second, we argue that traditional definitions of work preparation must be broadened significantly for young people to derive maximum benefit in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing economic environment. Most efforts to "improve work preparation" for disadvantaged youth have been construed in terms of job-related training. They emphasize imparting academic or technical skills that employers might find attractive, with teaching occurring in fairly traditional settings as part of relatively short interventions. As Chapter 3 will detail, this approach has had disappointing results for a variety of reasons.

Based on research and practice, we define the goal of "work preparation" broadly: **to provide adequate preparation and qualifications for sustained labor market participation and lifelong learning so that all young people can move toward economic self-sufficiency and positive engagement as family members and citizens.** This definition intentionally parallels the framework of Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) for the Casey Foundation on Community Ecology and Youth Resilience, which views economic self-sufficiency, healthy family and social relationships, and good citizenship as "what it takes to secure a sense of achievement, freedom, and participation in mainstream adult life" (P/PV 1994).

This definition encompasses more than traditional vocational education or specific skills training programs. It sees work preparation—particularly in today's changing economy—as an incremental, multidimensional, developmental process of building **competence, confidence, and connections.** Being prepared for work and a career requires development, over time, of a repertoire of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and experiences that an individual can draw

upon to make the most of a range of opportunities in the labor market—and life. And that repertoire cannot be fully developed in an environment that is lacking in rich opportunities for employment, quality learning, and engagement in a vital community life. To a great extent, healthy development into adulthood and preparation for work are synonymous.

Think about the hopes and wishes we have for young people—our own children, those of our relatives and neighbors, those we have never met. They are pretty simple. We want our children to develop to their potential, to be healthy, happy, and productively engaged in family, community, and work life. We want for them what we want for ourselves.

How do we try to help young people we love increase their chances for productive adulthood? Here, too, the list is fairly short. We try to keep them healthy, to provide a secure and loving family life, to help them learn in school and outside it, to interact with neighbors in a community that is safe and rich in resources and opportunities, and to provide choices about work and careers that earn them enough to pursue their interests and dreams and make it possible for those they love to do the same. We try to help them be able to advance academically or occupationally or both—to be able to choose their futures, not have the future forced upon them.

In healthy communities, this process of entering the adult world of careers and responsibility appears to be a natural, almost effortless part of growing up. Young people are supported in their development by family, educational, community, and economic institutions that function well enough and have sufficient resources—parents and other family members; schools and teachers; other community-based educational, religious, and social institutions; employers and their workers. Young people benefit from positive role models, rich networks of employment-related contacts and information, and expectations that are motivating.

In disadvantaged communities, the institutions of family and community are weaker, under greater stress, and less equipped to provide young people with the knowledge, skills, guidance, role models, or experiences that make it easier to get a job, keep it, and make effective career advancement decisions.

Concentrated poverty scars people and communities in ways that reinforce each other. Rising joblessness contributes to declining marriage rates and the formation of fewer two-parent families. Foster care enrollments jump as single parents find it harder to provide for their children. School learning, social relations and peer attachments are weakened by unstable housing and frequent moves among poor families. With joblessness widespread, disposable income in the community shrinks and businesses fail. The socializing institutions—family, school, church and employment—have trouble holding in check the attraction of the oppositional culture, with its pressure to join gangs and engage in anti-social behaviors. Neighborhoods become less safe. Arrests and incarceration become almost a given of growing up in such neighborhoods. Involvement with the justice system further restricts education and employment options, accelerating the downward spiral for young people, their families, and the communities in which they live.

In these communities, work preparation strategies must be consciously generated and sustained—to provide through concerted interventions the kinds of opportunities and experiences that fortunate youth take for granted as part of everyday life.

The challenge facing the Casey Foundation and others trying to improve the work preparation of disadvantaged young people in our nation's cities involves finding ways to strengthen local institutions and their interactions so that young people growing up in these environments have more of the services, opportunities, and supports that are available to their counterparts in healthier communities.²

Well-designed and comprehensive workforce preparation strategies can indeed help individuals improve their chances in the labor market (even in a labor market that does not provide adequate employment for the population as a whole). In addition, and

equally important, community-level efforts to address work preparation can change the way public and private sector institutions collaborate and interact. Such efforts can serve as a powerful vehicle for bringing together schools, colleges, employers, community-based organizations, government, and other local institutions and actors around broad community revitalization initiatives to improve economic opportunity and the ability of local residents to take advantage of that improvement.

The Youth Population: Priorities for Action

Who are the young people most in need of better preparation for careers and lifelong learning? In 1995, 32 million Americans were between 16 and 24 years old, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1996). Of these, over half were in high school or college (8.1 million and 8.7 million respectively); large proportions of these students were active in the labor market. Among recent high school graduates not enrolled in college, about 80 percent participated in the labor market and just over 20 percent of these were unemployed. However, among the 604,000 young people who dropped out of school during the 1994-95 school year, participation rates were much lower, about 68 percent, and unemployment higher, just under 30 percent.

These simple statistics begin to differentiate between youth who are progressing toward productive adulthood and those who are not, but they mask great variations in the opportunities and outcomes among population groups—among race and ethnic groups, among families of different socioeconomic status, and between those in inner cities and their suburban or rural counterparts. Fortunately, recent research provides a wealth of data on “winners and losers” in educational and labor markets.³ These data help identify the populations of greatest need in relation to employment, income, and work preparation. It also identifies targets of opportunity for innovative policies and practices.

² See Zeldin (1995) for a useful presentation of a youth development framework emphasizing supports and opportunities that all young people need to develop into productive and responsible adults. This report connects that framework to work preparation for young people.

³ Much of the data summarized here comes from an excellent recent report prepared for the Levitan Center on Employment Policy by Andrew Sum and W. Neal Fogg of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University (Sum and Fogg 1996).

In our view, three groups of youth are in great need of improved access to opportunities for work, learning and career advancement:⁴

- Dropouts who lack a high school credential;
- High school graduates who obtain only a diploma or GED; and
- In-school youth who are unlikely to complete high school or continue into postsecondary learning.

High school dropouts have suffered the most in recent years in terms of labor market performance.

One of the most dramatic economic trends of the past two decades has been the widening gap between the earnings of those with a high school diploma or less and those with a college degree. Between 1979 and 1987, for example, men with a high school degree or less and one to five years in the labor force saw their average real weekly earnings drop 18 percent, while men with similar experience in the labor market but also a college degree experienced average wage increases of more than 11 percent (Katz and Murphy 1992).

The deterioration of labor market outcomes has been most severe for high school dropouts. Between 1973 and 1994, the percentage of the male dropouts who were employed for at least one week during the year declined 15 percent; for female dropouts, the decline was about 10 percent. The mean annual earnings of young male dropouts (ages 17-21) declined an incredible 38 percent during the period; that of young female dropouts declined 19 percent (Sum et al. 1996).⁵

For males, there is little improvement as dropouts age. While female dropouts have kept real annual

earnings close to their 1973 levels through increased labor force participation and increased hours worked, the real annual earnings of young adult males between 22 and 29 were 42 percent lower in 1994 than in 1973.

Since 1980, the absolute number of dropouts has declined by about 35 percent. The dropout rate has declined from 14 to 11 percent. The reason for the decline in the number of new dropouts has been the shrinking of the youth cohort—a trend that is beginning to reverse. The number of teenagers in the 14-17 age group has begun to increase. And rapid growth in Hispanic immigrant populations has created a countertrend to gains in high school attainment made by whites and blacks (Sum et al. 1996).

Young people who obtained either a traditional high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) but did not continue their studies in further education fared somewhat better than dropouts; but they too have lost ground over the past twenty years.

While their ability to find employment during the year declined only modestly from 1973 to 1994 (3 to 4 percent) and is over 90 percent for male graduates and 78 percent for females graduates, real annual income has declined significantly. For male high school graduates, annual real earnings dropped 25 percent between 1973 and 1994; for females, the decline was 17 percent.

The population of young people who have completed high school but have not enrolled in further education or earned a postsecondary credential is quite large: more than one in three recent high school graduates do not continue on to postsecondary education.

⁴ There are differences in the severity of the challenge facing individuals from each of these groups (as well as individuals within each group). In general, dropouts fare the worst; high school completers not enrolled in further education have somewhat better employment and earnings but still lose ground. Within each group, black males have seen their labor market prospects deteriorate most dramatically, with Hispanic males in the middle and white males affected least. In terms of educational attainment, the story is different: blacks have made steady gains in high school completion since 1973, while the influx of Hispanic immigrants has dramatically altered the composition of the least educated segments of the population. While the variations by race and ethnicity and by gender are important (particularly to strategies for changes in policy and practice), we cannot afford to be sanguine about prospects of any of these groups.

⁵ Because employment and earnings for young people are sensitive to business cycles, it is important to compare statistics from comparable stages of the national cycle. 1973 was a peak year; 1994 was the fourth year of a steady recovery from the last recession.

Still, this reflects a marked improvement over the past fifteen years. In 1980, two- and four-year college enrollments of recent high school graduates was only 50 percent. Now it has stabilized at about 63 percent.

However, gains in college enrollment, particularly among minorities, are not yet being matched by gains in completion. For example, while the percentage of black high school graduates enrolling in college has climbed to over 51 percent, more than half do not continue their studies into the second year (compared to a national non-retention rate of only about one-third). The economic benefits of one year of college with no credential earned are minimal: consequently, this large group is seeing its earnings erode as sharply as those who stop their formal education after twelfth grade.

The statistics on both dropouts and graduates hide an important consideration. While the high school dropout rate has declined, many of those counted as graduates obtained a GED or other alternative credential rather than a regular diploma. Sum et al. (1996) estimate that this number approached 12 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in 1993. As they note, when combined with the dropout rate, *this implies that nearly 23 of every 100 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. did not leave high school with a regular diploma.* This statistic is important because the earnings of GED holders tend to be lower than those of graduates with regular diplomas who do not continue postsecondary studies. In fact, some studies have even found that their earnings differ little, if at all, from those of dropouts.

The most severe labor market problems are concentrated among specific groups of young people—particularly “disconnected” men, of color, living in our nation’s inner cities.

Inner-city youth, particularly males of color, are overrepresented in both the above at-risk groups—and their prospects have deteriorated dramatically. Cities are home for 75 percent of African Americans in this country and 95 percent of immigrants of color (Curtis 1995).⁶ Thirty years ago, the income of black men was higher in the cities than in the suburbs. Today, the reverse is true. The employment and earnings of young black men have been most severely affected in cities where employment growth as a whole has been slow and manufacturing decline rapid (Bluestone et al. 1994; Bound and Freeman 1992). In the 1970s, three out of four black men were employed full-time, full-year; two thirds saw their earnings rise. In the 1980s, only one in two black men was employed full-time, full-year and only half had earnings gains (Rose 1994). As one powerful summary of the evidence concluded, “Black males have fewer opportunities in the job market, are employed far less frequently, and gain much less from their work efforts than do their white counterparts” (Center for the Study of Social Policy 1994).⁷

Official unemployment rates for black and Hispanic urban youth run two to three times that of white youth. And these rates underestimate the problem: many urban youth who would like to work are not considered unemployed because they have given up looking for work. According to one study, between 75 and 90 percent of urban black youth are not working; for Hispanic youth, the proportion is between 50 and 85 percent (Wuest 1993). Another study estimates that about one in four 23-year-old black men and women have no earnings at all (Lerman 1996).

Dropout rates in urban school districts are much higher than average, rising above 35 percent in one

⁶ The high percentages of minority youth in urban areas explains why many analyses use statistics on minority youth and urban youth almost synonymously (as we do to some extent). These analyses are oversimplified, as evidenced by multi-city research that highlights the differences in population mix among large and mid-sized U.S. cities. At the same time, the overlap between economic and educational disadvantage and racial and ethnic minority status is significant in terms of general trends, particularly among the most disadvantaged urban dwellers.

⁷ Moss and Tilly (1991) argue that while the same labor market challenges facing African American men apply also to Latino men, the dynamics are less severe. Employment and earnings problems are not as bad. Single motherhood is less common. Generalizations about the Latino population are more difficult to sustain: data is harder to come by and the population itself is much more varied by region, national origin, and duration in the U.S. than the black population.

out of four urban districts and reaching 60-70 percent in some schools that are predominantly black and Hispanic (Coley 1995). The percentage of black and Hispanic youth ages 16-24 who are both out of school and out of work is significantly higher than their percentage in the population. In 1992, about 22 percent of blacks and 16 percent of Hispanics were both officially jobless and also out of school, compared to their shares in the population of 12 and 8 percent respectively.

One recent study has tried to identify and describe the population of young people who are least likely to make effective transitions from youth to adult responsibilities of work, school, and family formation (Brown 1996). This study found that 10 percent of America's youth were "disconnected" for at least an entire year between the ages of 16 and 23—defined as not in school, not working, not in the armed forces, and not married to anyone connected through these roles.

The disconnected are disproportionately from poor families, families with parents who lack high school degrees, single-parent families, and families that received welfare. High school dropouts are quite likely to be disconnected for extended periods during their transition years: among young men, 50 percent of long-term disconnected were high school dropouts, compared to only 6 percent among those who had never been disconnected.

Disconnection and social isolation are greater in poor urban neighborhoods than in less distressed communities, but the rates vary significantly for white, Hispanic, and African-American youth. For men the rates are 7, 13, and 23 percent respectively; for women, rates vary from a low of 9 percent for whites to 21 percent for Hispanics and 34 percent for African Americans. The extent to which different populations are disconnected for extended periods of their young adulthood also varies: the percentage of young people who were disconnected for four or more years between the ages of 16 and 23 ranged from a low of 5 and 7 percent for white women and men respectively, to rates of 14 and 11 percent for

Hispanic women and men, and of 17 and 18 percent for African-American women and men.

Another group is also at-risk: in-school youth who are likely to drop out or stop their formal education after twelfth grade or its equivalent. These young people will also have limited opportunities to be lifelong learners and to earn a good living without changes in the quality of instruction and supports they receive while still in school.

For efficiency reasons alone, early interventions are important. The research on disconnected youth found that nearly 90 percent of those disconnected in late youth (ages 20 to 23) were first disconnected as teens. Roughly one-half were disconnected before age 18. Moreover, research shows that it is easier to keep young people in school than it is to get them back once they have left the formal system.

Thus, while dropouts and those completing high school are indeed the hardest hit by the changing demands of the new economy, work preparation strategies cannot afford to concentrate solely on those who have already fallen (or been pushed) out of the system. Rather, work preparation strategies must address both in-school and out-of-school populations, those who have already become disconnected and those who are likely to become so without significant changes in their daily lives and school and in their communities.

To succeed, new approaches must bring into closer alignment the two parallel and largely unrelated systems that prepare young people for the future—the education system and the "second chance" training system. Strategies to prepare disadvantaged urban youth for careers and for productive lives must link and align these systems and their programs, standards, credentials, and pathways. In addition, efforts to improve and credential skills must be embedded in broader initiatives to improve the economic and social "landscape of opportunity" facing urban youth—whether they are in or out-of-school. These challenges and priorities for action are the subject of this report.

Barriers to Productive Transitions for Disadvantaged Urban Youth

Disadvantaged urban youth trying to find their way to a productive adulthood of employment, family and active citizenship face a number of serious obstacles to success. Some of the obstacles, which have resulted in the earnings and employment deterioration, are described in the previous chapter. There are barriers on **the demand side**, in terms of available opportunities for jobs and income, as well as barriers on **the supply side**, evident in the skills, attitudes, and other characteristics of individuals. There are also obstacles presented by the capacity and effectiveness of both formal and informal institutions designed to **connect the two** and improve the match between available work and potential workers. These obstacles reinforce each other in complex and sometimes overwhelming ways for residents of distressed communities.

Strategies to improve work preparation for the hardest-to-employ urban youth cannot succeed if they focus exclusively on one side of the labor market or the other. Policy and practice must address both the demand-side and supply-side barriers facing young people; and those efforts must be coordinated so that multiple barriers are addressed simultaneously. In this chapter, we describe in detail the most serious barriers facing urban young people today as they try to enter the world of productive work and adulthood. We explore the implications of each for comprehensive strategies to improve this population's ability to enter and advance in the labor market. In Chapter 3, we assess the evidence on the effectiveness of different strategies to help disadvantaged urban youth overcome these barriers.

The most powerful obstacle to economic well-being in U.S. cities over the past two decades has been on the demand side: the deterioration of labor market opportunities for disadvantaged residents, young and old. As the economy has undergone significant structural change, propelled largely by new technologies and increasingly competitive product markets, the mix of industries and occupations in the economy has shifted. So, too, has the location of employment opportunities between and within regions. The level of unionization has declined precipitously, while the number of part-time, temporary, and other contingent jobs has increased steadily. The kinds of tasks and skills required within jobs have changed markedly as well.

These shifts, which show no sign of reversing, have depressed the employment and earnings of young people, in particular less-educated and minority youth. Researchers attribute a significant role in this grim picture to the declining demand for urban workers who are less-skilled, less-experienced, and young. Strategies for improving the life opportunities of disadvantaged youth must start from this reality. It is the primary reality facing young urban dwellers as they try to make

their way in the changing world. It affects their attitudes and behaviors, their choices about schooling, parenting, and employment, and their relationship to mainstream social and economic life—often in negative and self-defeating ways.

Yet, while structural changes in the nature of economic opportunity may constitute the most significant barrier facing disadvantaged youth, these shifts interact with other important factors to create what Philip Moss and Chris Tilly (1991) of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell have called a “web of mutually reinforcing circumstances and behaviors that can lead to individuals and communities becoming trapped in joblessness.” In distressed urban neighborhoods, William Julius Wilson (1994) emphasizes that high joblessness and problems of social organization interact in ways that “reinforce the marginal economic position of many of the residents.” Wilson categorizes these conditions in terms of:

structural factors (such as inadequate informal job information networks and lack of legitimate employment opportunities), social factors (such as the development of less disciplined habits associated with infrequent or casual work) and cultural factors (such as the transmission of self doubt and collective beliefs that lead to self doubts about one's chances to achieve approved societal goals).

The result can be a vicious circle of declining readiness for and ability to succeed in a more competitive, less favorable job market. In Wilson's view, the plummeting position of inner-city youth in the labor market leads many to express negative attitudes toward work and their future prospects. These attitudes can be reinforced and amplified in the social life of neighborhoods if joblessness and declining options are the rule rather than the exception. If negative attitudes harden into behaviors on the street and at work, young people can become less desirable to employers. They will experience more discrimination when they seek work, and they will have a harder time maintaining employment if they become—or are perceived to be—more likely to clash with supervisors. In the absence of gainful employment, young people may turn to illegal economic activities. If they get involved with the criminal-justice

system, their chances of obtaining responsible employment lessen significantly. The cycle of disadvantage spirals downward, more difficult to escape at every turn.

This chapter summarizes the evidence on the most significant strands of this mutually reinforcing web of circumstances. We focus in particular on five barriers confronting young people, particularly in central cities, as they engage in the world around them and make choices about their futures:

1. Structural changes in the nature and location of available employment opportunities

The changing structure of employment opportunity is both the backdrop and the starting point for understanding the deteriorating labor market prospects of less-educated urban youth. Of paramount importance here are broad shifts since World War II, particularly over the past two decades, in the relative size and vitality of different industries and occupations as the United States moves from a manufacturing to a service economy; the geographic location of employment nationally, particularly within metropolitan areas; and related changes in job structure, including the growth of part-time and other forms of contingent work. These changes, driven primarily by technological innovation and growing competition in national and international product markets, have greatly exacerbated the traditional shortage of jobs for lower-skilled residents of the center city.

2. Mismatches between the skills of disadvantaged youth and “what employers want”

Growing evidence suggests that important skills mismatches have developed in urban areas, particularly at the low end of the labor market. These mismatches keep an increasing proportion of disadvantaged young urban residents from successfully entering the labor market. In an economy increasingly based on services, knowledge, and information, employer demand is high and increasing for a variety of skills—from the ability to deal with customers or use computers to skills in arithmetic, reading, and writing—even in relatively low-skill jobs. For young urban dwellers who have never completed high school, the lack of an educational credential—and the basic skills associated with it—presents a serious obstacle

to employment and career advancement. Job prospects are not much better for those who have completed high school, in part because many urban high school graduates lack the skills and work experience that employers seek: 60 percent of twelfth graders, for example, cannot perform at basic math proficiency levels (Mullis et al. 1993). This mismatch is one reason why the vacancy rates are higher and longer for jobs in the central city, despite the large pool of unemployed residents there.

3. Employer discrimination in attitudes and behavior

Both the changing structure of employment opportunities and the apparent mismatch between the skills employers want and the skills less-educated urban residents possess are disadvantageous to young minority residents. However, the picture is even more complex. An aspect of changing employer demand that has had a particularly damaging effect on African-American males is discrimination in employment practices. If employers believe—for whatever reasons, rightly or wrongly—that certain groups are, on average, less likely to succeed and therefore constitute a higher employment risk, they will be less likely to recruit them, hire them, or provide opportunities for advancement. There is evidence that growing employer concerns about the skills, behaviors, and attitudes of young minority men—particularly fears about crime and violence—have indeed depressed labor market demand for this population, even while overall employment discrimination appears to be declining (Holzer 1996).

4. Weak family and community supports that reinforce negative attitudes and behaviors

Negative influences from family and neighborhood life in distressed communities may further complicate the efforts of many young urban residents to make successful transitions to careers and productive adulthood. The influence of family, peers, and neighborhood relationships can help youth find the confidence, motivation, and trust in others that they need to succeed. However, in the most distressed neighborhoods, these relationships are more likely to reinforce negative attitudes and behaviors. When sufficiently concentrated and serious, unemploy-

ment and underemployment contribute to broader economic and social disorganization, making it much more difficult for individuals to overcome disadvantages. These effects are significant in the most disconnected urban neighborhoods.

5. Weaknesses within and among youth-serving institutions

Weaknesses within youth-serving institutions, coupled with the lack of coordination and strategic alliances among them, often stymie the efforts of young people to overcome adversity and use community resources to their advantage. Many institutions in a community can and do influence a child's development, attitudes, and decisions. Schools, informal youth organizations, community-based employment and training providers, and churches are among the places where youth can learn with and from adults and each other. Often, though, the fiscal realities facing these institutions and the obstacles to their effective collaboration act as a further barrier to individuals who might try to improve their ability to compete and succeed in the labor market.

Five Interrelated Barriers to Productive Transitions

The following pages describe in greater detail the dynamics and impacts of these five barriers and their interactions, including some of the implications for effective change strategies. This presentation sets the stage for Chapter 3, which assesses what we know from research and practice about strategies to overcome the barriers, and Chapter 4, which recommends directions for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other foundations to pursue in addressing this difficult set of challenges.

1. The changing structure of employment opportunity is both the backdrop and the starting point for understanding why the labor market prospects of less-educated urban youth have deteriorated.

Several major trends have been clear in the changing economic opportunities available to less-educated urban residents in recent decades. Each of these shifts presents urban residents, particularly those trying to enter the labor market, with a less favorable set of employment options than would have been available to them just a few decades ago. These

shifts constitute a major factor in the worsening job and earnings prospects of urban youth, particularly minority males.

Effects due to the changing mix of industries and occupations:

Since the early 1970s, the most obvious and significant shift in the distribution of employment has been the decline in manufacturing work and a corresponding rapid growth of both higher-wage, higher-skill and lower-wage service employment. This trend has contributed to rising inequality across the economy, with black men feeling the impact most acutely (Bound and Holzer 1991). According to one study, the decline in manufacturing employment may account for as much as one-third of the total drop for black men in the 1980s and of the growing wage differential between white and black men, after controlling for education and experience (Bernstein 1995).

Moss and Tilly (1991) suggest two possible explanations for the dramatic shifts in the distribution of black men within industry and occupational sectors. One is that blacks have left the sector faster than whites as manufacturing employment has shrunk, presumably because layoffs determined by seniority penalize blacks disproportionately. The other is that black men are both less likely to find new jobs in *any* sector as they leave manufacturing and more likely to move into lower-wage jobs in the service sector than their white counterparts, who appear to have greater success as a group moving into higher-paying white collar work.

Both explanations appear to have merit. Between 1970 and 1990, the proportion of black men employed in manufacturing declined 32 percent, compared to a 25 percent drop for white men. Blacks began the period more heavily concentrated in manufacturing than whites; by 1990, their concentration in manufacturing was slightly lower (Reardon 1993). At the same time, the transition from blue collar to white collar employment appears to have raised white men's earnings over what they would otherwise have been, while depressing black men's earnings (Howell 1991).

The rise and fall of government employment—and

the importance of those jobs to black economic opportunity—has also affected the demand for black labor (Moss 1988). Blacks made significant gains in local, state, and federal workplaces during the 1960s and 1970s, but such employment leveled off and began a steady decline in the mid-1970s. Since then, this source of quality jobs and upward mobility has been less available.

Occupational shifts reveal a similar pattern. The emergence of new occupations and rising skill requirements for existing occupations have favored better-educated workers and made it more difficult for less-educated workers to find full-time permanent employment that can support a family. Maury Gittleman and David Howell (1995) have divided the nation's jobs into six clusters based on five indicators of job quality—earnings and benefits, skill requirements, working conditions, employment status, and institutional setting (for example, in the public sector and with union coverage). They examined changes in the distribution of jobs within these clusters between 1973 and 1990 and concluded that:

- Jobs in the "best" cluster have been steadily and rapidly expanding as a share of total employment in the past two decades;
- Job opportunities have fallen sharply in the "routine white collar" and "high wage blue collar" clusters since 1979; and
- Employment shares in the job clusters representing lowest quality employment were largely unchanged after 1979, as low-quality service jobs replaced low-quality blue collar employment.

These occupational shifts have affected major demographic groups differently. Women—white, black, Hispanic—made substantial gains in the better job clusters while their concentration fell in the lowest quality jobs. In contrast, male employment shifted from blue collar employment clusters into both the better and worse jobs in the economy. For black males, the shifts were particularly pronounced in both directions. However, the progress of black and Hispanic into the top job cluster halted after 1983, and both black and Hispanic men were more concentrated in the worst jobs in 1990 than in 1979. According to Gittleman and Howell, by 1990, close to 75 percent of all employed black and Hispanic

men and nearly 60 percent of employed black and Hispanic women were employed in the lower three clusters (compared to 50 percent of white men and 41 percent of white women). Moreover, the quality of employment—measured in terms of real earnings, health insurance benefits, union coverage, and involuntary part-time employment—declined most markedly in those clusters where minorities are overrepresented.

Effects due to shifts in the location of employment opportunities:

While broad economic forces remake the national employment landscape, an additional dynamic is taking place within metropolitan areas. For several decades, manufacturing and service firms have been moving from the center city to the suburbs. John Kasarda (1995; 1989) and others have argued that, in metropolitan areas with significant housing segregation and a heavy concentration of minority population in the central city, the relative expansion of suburban employment opportunities has contributed to the employment and earnings problems of minorities, in particular of less-educated young minorities. There is evidence that urban blacks have less access to employment opportunities than their white suburban counterparts, and some evidence suggests that this situation has worsened in the past two decades (Kasarda 1990b).

This "spatial mismatch" hypothesis is controversial, however, and economists disagree on its impact on earnings and employment. One study has concluded that the concentration of blacks in the central city could explain as much as one-third of the earnings gap between blacks and whites (Price and Mills 1985); another estimates that the mismatch explains a more modest 15 percent of the gap (Bound and Freeman 1992); a third (Welch 1990) finds no evidence of a spatial mismatch effect for black men.

For young black men, the spatial mismatch does appear to be a serious barrier to success. Proximity to work matters greatly to the employment and

earnings of young black men, who depend on neighborhood jobs for employment.⁸ Yet, predominantly black neighborhoods have a weaker local employment base and a lower ratio of jobs to teens than urban white neighborhoods (Ellwood 1986; Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 1990).

This disadvantage may have lasting damage. The early labor market experiences of young urban men may influence not only their long-term prospects in the labor market but also their ability to move to healthier neighborhoods (Moss and Tilly 1991).

Effects due to other job characteristics:

Other changes in the nature of available employment opportunities may also play an important role in trends toward employment and earnings inequality. One is the growth of part-time and temporary employment. Involuntary part-time employment has increased rapidly in the past twenty years, and black men appear to be more likely than the average worker to have to settle for a part-time job involuntarily (Tilly 1990). The temporary help industry, particularly its lower-skill and lower-paid segments, are also disproportionately minority (Seavey and Kazis 1994). Such jobs tend to pay less and provide fewer benefits than permanent positions with similar responsibilities.

Another factor in the declining quality of available job opportunities may be the significant and steady drop in unionization. This has resulted from job losses in once heavily unionized industries, combined with a lack of organizing successes in new and growing industries. As a result, unions are less able to protect the earning power of their members—and, by extension, other workers—in the face of competition at home and abroad.

A final factor concerns the relatively low level of small business ownership and entrepreneurship among blacks. Black business ownership has historically been quite low (12.5 per 1,000 in the population, compared to 64 per 1,000 for the population as a

⁸ There are many reasons why young black men are more neighborhood-bound in their job search, including: poorer access to transportation; fear of traveling to predominantly white areas and working in predominantly white environments; lack of job networks outside the neighborhood; lack of knowledge of the broader downtown or metro-regional labor market; and the perception of racism as a cause of prior failure to secure employment outside the neighborhood.

whole), as has black self-employment. Some economists argue that low rates of entrepreneurship affect black employment generally, because ethnic businesses tend to hire disproportionately from their own ethnic group. Moreover, trends in the economy may be widening this barrier to black well-being. Although black business ownership has grown faster than the national average, the growth appears to be concentrated in business services; in decline are the number of "traditional" black businesses. These include the funeral homes, hairdressers, barber shops, and so on that have been important neighborhood institutions and more likely to preferentially hire blacks. In addition, small businesses may play an even more important local economic role in the future (Piore 1990). If this is true, the under-representation of blacks among small business owners could further constrain their urban employment options.

Implications for work preparation strategies:

These trends in the nature and quality of employment opportunities lead to a number of conclusions about directions for innovation in policy and practice. The backdrop is greater competition for a narrowing band of employment opportunities and declining access to high-wage employment. Five implications emerge:

- **Rethink the boundaries between cities and their suburbs:** The inequities that result from the abandonment of center cities by many industries that once provided significant employment options for less-educated workers must be addressed. This may require a political strategy for revisiting the mutual relations and responsibilities of cities and suburbs, including tax and service-delivery policies. Another emerging strategy focuses on getting urban dwellers to suburban jobs. While the transition cannot be stopped, metro-wide strategies should be encouraged around access to employment, labor market information, and training opportunities.
- **Emphasize industrial retention:** While broad shifts from manufacturing to service employment are an historical trend that cannot be stopped, efforts can be pursued that help cities retain relatively high-paying jobs that require relatively low educational credentials. This means bringing to

bear a combination of political leadership and technical know-how to help existing firms modernize and position themselves in the market for a successful future in urban settings.

- **Enrich existing low-skill jobs:** Strategies for retaining good, lower-skilled jobs in manufacturing will have to be augmented by efforts to improve the quality of existing low-wage and low-skill jobs that are available to urban residents. Some of these efforts require national policy initiatives, such as universal health insurance. Other approaches to enriching low-skill jobs could include: more unionization of low-wage jobs; extending non-wage benefits to part-time and temporary workers; and credentialing skills and experience learned on the job.
- **Encourage entrepreneurship:** A fruitful area for investment may be efforts to help minority urban residents locate financial and human capital to launch new businesses and bring a more entrepreneurial spirit into urban communities—in schools, community-based organizations, and other institutions.
- **Explore the potential of new labor market intermediaries:** Access to employment opportunities and help in navigating the changing world of work are often sorely lacking in disadvantaged communities. In most communities, new institutions will be needed to help improve individuals' labor market knowledge and connections. The Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative is experimenting in six cities with creating and strengthening such community-based labor market intermediaries that can help low-skill workers advance by improved information about, and access to, jobs across the local labor market. The federal government's "one-stop shopping" initiative might also stimulate new local labor market dynamics and institutional structures. A private sector brokering entity that has begun to receive greater attention for its potential in helping link residents with jobs is the temporary help or staffing firm, increasingly the door through which clerical and industrial workers (as well as higher skilled employees) enter employment, particularly in large firms.

2. There is growing evidence that important skills mismatches have developed in urban areas—particularly at the low end of the labor market—and that these mismatches keep an increasing proportion of young black and Hispanic residents from successfully entering the labor market.

An assessment of the impact of the changing labor market facing urban young people requires a corresponding look at the match between education and skill levels on the one hand and the structure of employment opportunities on the other. Is there a “skills mismatch”? Is it getting worse? If so, is it a factor in the worsening ability of young disadvantaged city dwellers to find and keep decent paying jobs?

At an aggregate national level, labor demand is clearly shifting toward jobs requiring more education. Industries and occupations that are growing tend to employ, on average, better-skilled workers, and those that are contracting have relatively higher proportions of less-educated workers (Katz and Murphy 1992). As a result, demand for skilled labor is increasing and demand for less-educated, less-skilled labor is weakening. How quickly this shift is taking place—and its impact on the low-skill end of the labor market—is the subject of much debate. (Mishel and Teixeira 1990; Packer and Wirt 1992). Some argue that while the overall demand for skill has been occurring for decades, it is developing quite gradually (Howell 1994). Others emphasize that the nature of skills in particular demand at the low end of the job structure have changed significantly (Holzer 1996).

For blacks in the labor market, the “skills mismatch” argument must be qualified. The gap widened between black and white wages during the 1970s and 1980s; at the same time as the gap *narrowed* between black and white educational attainment. The percentage of blacks graduating high school approached parity with that of whites: 83.5 percent of black and 85.1 percent of white 25- to 29-year-olds in 1991 had graduated high school (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Moreover, while the deterioration of relative wages among black men was significant among high school dropouts, it was equally severe among black men with a college degree (Bound and Freeman 1992). Performance on standardized tests

among black youth reinforces the view that educational attainment and performance, by themselves, do not explain the worsening labor market position of minority youth. Tests scores for African Americans have climbed over time, and the differences between black and white performance have not widened (Jencks 1991).

Yet, other evidence indicates that there is indeed a growing mismatch between the skills of less-educated young black men and those that employers seek in entry-level employees, and there are several reasons for serious concern. One reason has to do with the concentration of poor educational opportunity and outcomes in inner-city schools. Another is a steady “raising of the bar” by employers in terms of the skills, credentials, and experience they look for at the low end of the labor market.

First, on the supply side: while the gap between blacks and whites in school performance has not widened, it is still quite wide—particularly among males. On the 1990 NAEP exams, white twelfth graders were over three times more likely than blacks to be able to explain complicated literary and informational material and over twice as likely to compute decimals and simple fractions correctly (Center for the Study of Social Policy 1994). Significantly, black male students aged 10-13 in 1990 were over twice as likely as whites to fall two or more grades behind—10 percent versus 4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Black males are over three times as likely as white males to be in special education programs. These two indicators—grade retention and special education status—correlate closely with the likelihood of dropping out before completing high school.

Moreover, aggregate statistics on educational attainment and high school completion mask great variation. Some researchers have hypothesized that the quality of urban schools has deteriorated noticeably in the past two decades (Smith and Welch 1989). Quality may also be diverging *within* urban districts, as neighborhood schools lose some of their best students, teachers, and administrators to magnet programs. While dropout rates are improving across the country, they remain extremely high in many urban districts. In some large cities, fewer than

half of entering students complete high school (Dryfoos 1990). The New York City Board of Education estimates that 17,000 youth drop out each year, and only 56 percent of each age cohort graduate within seven years. The percentage of urban school districts with a dropout rate above 35 percent declined from a third to a quarter between 1990 and 1992-93, and 90 percent of urban districts reported a decline in their four-year dropout rate during that period (Coley 1995). However, more than 70 percent of urban districts reported an *increase* in the annual dropout rates of black and Hispanic students in the same period.

On the demand side, the evidence is growing that employers are expecting and requiring different and more complex skills from entry-level workers. Harry Holzer (1996) has recently completed a set of extensive employer surveys in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles as part of the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality. He has found that:

Most jobs available to less-educated workers require the daily performance of one or more cognitive/social tasks, such as dealing with customers, reading and writing, arithmetic calculations, and the use of computers.... Most employers also require such credentials as high school diplomas, specific experience, references, and/or previous training. Most of these job requirements are somewhat higher in the central cities than in the suburbs, even within occupational categories. Indeed, the fraction of non-college jobs in the central city that require none of these tasks to be performed or that require none of these credentials is only about 5 percent.

Holzer further concludes:

Employer skill requirements appear to limit the hiring of both Hispanics and blacks for many kinds of jobs.... Jobs that require daily computer use and arithmetic pose particular barriers to the employment of black and Hispanic males; those that require high school diplomas and customer interaction are also less available to Hispanic males, while those requiring specific experience and previous training are less available to black males.

As part of the same multi-city study, Moss and Tilly (1995b) have conducted extensive interviews with

employers on the changing nature of skills required in entry-level jobs. Employers describe increasing needs for "hard skills"—such as literacy, numeracy, and problem solving—stemming from organizational changes designed to boost quality or customer service or from changes that have made jobs more complex, variable, and multi-skilled.

Employers also emphasize the importance of "soft skills," such as a good work ethic and friendliness—particularly for entry-level employees. While a national survey conducted by Paul Osterman (1995) reported rising soft-skill demands in only a small minority of businesses, Moss and Tilly found evidence of widespread increased demand for soft skills in *entry-level* jobs. Two clusters of soft skills appear most critical. The first, *interaction*, includes friendliness, teamwork, the ability to fit in, spoken communication skills, appearance, and attire. The second, *motivation*, includes such characteristics as enthusiasm, a positive work attitude, commitment, dependability, and a willingness to learn. Employers point to heightened needs for both interactional and motivation skills due to increased competitive pressures and the growing emphasis on both customer service and greater responsibility from front-line employees.

Richard Murnane and Frank Levy (1996) have recently identified a set of New Basic Skills which they conclude are the "minimum skills people now need to get a middle-class job." These are the ability to:

- Read at a ninth grade level or higher;
- Do math at the ninth grade level or higher;
- Solve semistructured problems where hypotheses must be formed and tested;
- Work in groups with persons of various backgrounds;
- Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing; and
- Use personal computers to carry out simple tasks like word processing.

Implications for work preparation strategies:

The skills mismatch appears to be real, particularly at the low end of the labor market. It is evident that increased skill demands are not translating into better wages for these jobs or workers. The link between

skills and wages is weak, with declining wages having more to do with increased competition, the weakening of wage-setting institutions that had protected low-skill workers in the past, and an increase in competition for low-wage jobs. At the same time, employers seem to be requiring higher levels and new combinations of competencies in entry-level work.

This evidence argues for several emphases in strategies to improve the work preparation of urban youth:

- **Improve urban school quality:** The quality of the education in urban schools may be as important to the future prospects of young people as their ability to sit in classrooms long enough to graduate. Improved instruction and innovations in pedagogy can provide important motivators to excel and a way to teach the kinds of "soft skills" that traditional classroom instruction misses. They can also help keep young people in school and learning.
- **Bring employers into the discussion about skills, curriculum, and instruction:** Employer skill demands are changing. Workforce preparation strategies should include ways for local employers to communicate to school, employment and training, and other community institutions both what they expect and want from entry-level employees and ways to participate with those institutions in the design of instructional materials and methods.
- **Emphasize work experience:** One of the best places to learn workplace skills is at work. While many low-wage workplaces are uninspiring,

alienating environments, today's workplaces increasingly expect employees to operate in teams, deal effectively with cultural differences, and take initiative in reporting problems and working them out. These skills can be learned on the job, particularly if work experience is part of a broader school-based or community-based learning program. Work experience may also be a good way for young people to gain experience with computers, particularly youth who lack access to them at home or in school.

- **Strengthen the skill-development efforts of non-school youth organizations:** Schools do not reach all youth, particularly in communities with high dropout rates. In many urban areas, community-based organizations and clubs provide opportunities for young people to exercise leadership, develop teamwork skills, and gain self-confidence. Some have called these organizations the equivalent of "home rooms" for out-of-school youth. Strategies to increase the learning content of youth activities—and to connect youth organizations more closely with alternative and/or mainstream educational institutions—can help reach an important segment of the youth population.
3. **Discrimination in employment practices is an aspect of changing employer demand that has had a particularly negative effect on African-American males.**

There is a complicated relationship between the changing demand for on-the-job skills and employer discrimination against certain population subgroups.⁹ Employer attitudes manifest themselves in decisions

⁹ This section is excerpted from a background paper prepared for this project by Dr. Chris Tilly, Professor of Policy and Planning at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. The data on which that paper and this section are based include:

- In-depth interviews with 56 employers auto parts manufacturing, insurance, retail clothing, and local government in the Detroit and Los Angeles metropolitan areas, conducted by Tilly and his colleague Philip Moss in 1991-92 (Moss and Tilly 1995a, b);
- Interviews of about 40 employers in each of the Detroit and Atlanta areas during 1994-95, from an ongoing project led by Joleen Kirschenman of the University of Georgia, Moss, and Tilly;
- Two 1995 focus groups of young men of color involved in employment and training programs, conducted by Jobs for the Future in Boston and New York;
- A 1995 JFF-organized focus group of Boston-area public-sector and nonprofit employers and added in-depth interviews of Boston-area private-sector employers chosen for their success in hiring young, inner city men of color.

about hiring, retention, and promotions. Bias against certain groups—whether based on “pure” discrimination or stereotypes from past experience—depresses the demand for those groups in the labor market.¹⁰ In today’s job market, employer behaviors and attitudes toward young people, and toward less-educated minority youth in particular, pose a serious obstacle to the ability of many young people to advance toward a career.

As noted above, employers seeking entry-level workers describe increasing needs for both “hard skills,” such as literacy and problem solving, and “soft skills,” such as work ethic and friendliness. When surveyed, employers report that the greatest change in skill requirements of their low-skill jobs is an increase in the need for basic literacy and numeracy. At the same time, the growing emphasis on soft skills is striking—particularly motivation and such interaction skills as the ability to interact with customers and co-workers.

Employers often use race and ethnicity as a lens through which to assess an individual’s skills and potential. Employers are aware that African-American and Latino youth lag behind whites in educational attainment and other measures of hard skills, such as achievement test scores (Bound and Freeman 1992; Jencks 1991; O’Neill 1990). As a result, employers show a tendency to doubt the ability of young people of color to succeed in jobs with increasing basic academic skill requirements. For example, Holzer found that employers offering less-skilled jobs requiring daily use of arithmetic and reading disproportionately turn down black male and female applicants.

On the dimension of soft skills as well, employer perceptions put young people, and young minorities in particular, at a disadvantage. In interviews and surveys, employers criticize: young people in general, inner city residents, black females and males, and other racial and ethnic groups. This is consistent with the conclusion drawn from a recent

employer survey conducted by the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce (1995): “Many firms still see youth as undisciplined, uncommunicative, disinterested in work, and unwilling or unable to take a job seriously.”

Harsh judgments of young African-American men are especially widespread. It appears that employers’ views of black men are partly stereotype, partly an accurate perception of the skills and attitudes that many less-educated black men bring to the labor market, and partly the result of a cultural gap that reflects mutual misunderstanding between different groups in society, playing itself out in employment decisions and relations.

In Moss and Tilly’s study (1995b), employers voiced three concerns about the interactions of black men with customers and co-workers. First, a sizable minority of respondents described black men as defensive, hostile, or having a difficult “attitude” that complicates communication with supervisors, customers, or co-workers. This view was not always expressed unsympathetically: some employers commented that less-educated black men have adopted “tough” or suspicious attitudes in response to conditions they face. A second, far less prevalent, concern is with the spoken English of many young black men. Third, in some retail settings (and presumably other customer-service settings), employers try to avoid conflict or disaffection by attempting to “race match” workers to customers.

Employers surveyed were twice as likely to criticize black men’s work motivation as to express negative views of their interaction skills (although fewer than half expressed either criticism). However, a substantial majority agreed that immigrants have a stronger work ethic than native-born workers, a finding that bodes ill in many cities for less-skilled native-born blacks, who are increasingly competing with immigrant workers for jobs.

In focus groups conducted by Jobs for the Future, young men of color in Boston and New York were

¹⁰ Economists distinguish between “statistical” discrimination and “pure” discrimination. Statistical discrimination involves judgments about individual members of a group based on perceptions of the characteristics of average members of that group. Pure discrimination is based solely on the preferences of employers or their customers (Cain 1986; Becker 1971).

quick to confirm the pervasiveness of what they perceived to be employer hostility. When looking for work, they often faced suspicion and discomfort from interviewers. On the job, they felt similar emotional responses from white supervisors and co-workers even though they made an extra effort to convince whites of their trustworthiness and good intentions. They confirm Elijah Anderson's assertion (1994) of "a tendency to hold young black youth guilty until proven innocent."

The interplay among skills, stereotypes, and culture poses problems for less-educated young men in both the hiring process and once they are on the job. Young men of color in the focus groups stated that simply "getting their foot in the door" was their main problem. Interviews with employers reveal some of the reasons. Neckerman and Kirschenman (1991) discovered that some Chicago-area employers spoke openly of practicing overt discrimination, such as advertising only in Polish-language newspapers or ruling out applicants from certain neighborhoods. Audit studies of hiring practices have found that young black and Hispanic job seekers encounter discrimination about 25 percent of the time when they apply for entry-level employment, with an even higher rate for suburban employment (Bendick et al. 1994).

More commonly, hiring practices exclude young men of color in subtle ways. For example, recruitment via referrals from current employees reproduces a business' current workforce. Two-thirds of the employers surveyed by Moss and Tilly use employee referrals as a recruitment method for entry-level jobs, mirroring studies showing that most workers find a job through someone they know (Corcoran et al. 1980; Granovetter 1974; Holzer 1987). This makes obtaining a job more difficult in neighborhoods and industries where workers of color lack a foothold.

Heavy reliance on pre-employment interviews also cuts against young men of color. Employers acknowledge that the interview is inevitably subjective, but four out of five employers in Moss and Tilly's (1995b) sample listed it as their most important screen for entry-level positions. Rating the interview as the top screen is the strongest predictor of black under-representation

among these firms (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). Social-psychological research, including experiments, confirms that white interviewers—often unwittingly—treat black interviewees less favorably (Dipboye 1982; Word et al. 1974).

Managers often complain that young workers—and specifically young men of color from the inner city—do not know how to interview properly. The food service manager at a Boston-area hospital painted this picture:

A kid that comes in... and doesn't have good eye contact and doesn't have any social skills in terms of—maybe chewing gum, he might have his Walkman hanging down.... He's already starting from a negative because of the interview.... And no eye contact, slouched in the chair, answers like "yeah," "uh huh...." I'm not judging, in a sense, but if he doesn't have enough practical or common sense to go on an interview and look his best...

Retention of young workers of color poses its own challenges, perhaps even more so than the hiring process. Both employers and youth in our interviews agreed that in some environments isolation and scapegoating tend to push minority workers out, particularly when managers fail to explain job requirements clearly at the outset and when they fail to reach out to young workers in trouble. On the other hand, numerous employers criticized young people of all racial and ethnic groups for unreasonable job expectations (especially with respect to pay), insufficient patience, "thin skins," and inadequate concern for attendance and punctuality.

These employer perceptions are the product of a complicated mix of stereotypes and true skill differences, but they also constitute a large gray area that could be characterized as a "cultural gap." As a Latina personnel official for a retail chain put it in a discussion of high black male turnover:

It's very, very difficult for the white male manager to relate to [black male culture]. There isn't a lot of understanding. There isn't a lot of nurturing. There isn't a lot of openness going in either direction.... I mean the way you walk could turn somebody off, could turn a manager off.

Implications for workforce preparation strategies:

Discrimination in the entry-level labor market hurts young workers, with particularly harsh effects on the prospects of young black men. Yet, the ways in which employer bias interacts with both the skills and attitudes of young males and their street culture are complex. Moreover, such interactions can be addressed constructively. The opportunities point to a few priorities for comprehensive approaches to work preparation:

- **Improve the alignment between employer and youth perceptions and expectations:** Cultural gaps can be lessened through forums and other activities and events that enable employers and young people to better understand one another's expectations, preconceptions, and needs. Opportunities to talk with each other in neutral settings can be organized in schools, youth development programs, and community meetings. This can be part of a comprehensive approach to addressing barriers to employment.
- **Provide work experiences for youth as a way to build more trusting relationships:** Work relationships, built around expectations of responsibility and maturity and a clear sense of reward for performance, can be excellent opportunities for addressing and overcoming mutual distrust. Work experiences can help break stereotypes and build respect across age, ethnic, and other divides. This is not automatic, but with guidance and conscious attention, work relations can provide young people with important adult role models and adult workers with new motivation and pride.
- **Provide training for employers as well as for youth:** Both attitudes and behaviors must be addressed to tackle stereotypes and discrimination aggressively. Training in managing diversity can make a difference in the hiring, recruitment, and management practices of firms. This, in turn, can make the workplace a more hospitable learning and developmental environment for youth.
- **Reward positive employer role models:** Some observers have advocated for publicly embarrassing employers who clearly discriminate in recruitment and hiring. Targeted hiring audits can identify employers who systematically give

preferential treatment to candidates based on race and/or age. A less confrontational approach would reward with public recognition firms that make special efforts to hire urban youth for short-term or permanent positions in career ladder jobs or who are particularly aggressive in their commitment to diversify training for managers.

4. Negative influences that may arise from family and neighborhood life in distressed communities complicate the efforts of many young urban residents to make successful transitions to careers and productive adulthood.

Young people develop perceptions of the labor market and their employment prospects from their environment. They create a narrative that makes sense to them from their personal experience and that of their peers, family members, and others in their neighborhood. Positive role models and supports can help young people overcome disadvantages and navigate a hostile environment: they are at the heart of healthy development. Negative influences and experiences can lead to a spiraling down of expectations and motivation to find work and pursue a career—and to attitudes and behaviors that hinder integration into mainstream economic and social life.

In addition, like most of us, young people tend to find work through personal contacts or "employment networks." Many young workers will tell you that it is not what you know but who you know that gets you a job. But what if you don't know many employed people and you know even fewer who could hire you or refer you for employment? And what if the employment networks you can tap lead only to low-skill, low-pay, unstable jobs? This is the reality facing young people in many cities, particularly in those cities' distressed neighborhoods.

Barriers to the employment of disadvantaged young people can be created or exacerbated by an individual's own negative experiences in the labor market, the negative experience of family members, and living and relating to peers and adults in a neighborhood isolated from the mainstream of economic activity. Together, these effects contribute to joblessness and poverty that become increasingly serious

and debilitating over time and across generations. They can lead to hardened attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that economic market signals cannot overcome easily.

Effects due to an individual's own negative experiences in the labor market:

For any individual, long stretches of unemployment have what economists call "scarring effects." The longer a person is unemployed, the less likely it is he or she will be re-employed.

There is a racial dimension to this dynamic. According to economist Lisa Lynch (1989), the probability of re-employment is lower for non-white than for white workers. Moreover, while conventional wisdom has held that the effects are minimal for young people, recent studies indicate that unemployment may indeed reduce future employment prospects for minority high school students (Hotz and Tienda 1994) and for youth more generally (Rich 1994).

Effects due to the negative experience of family members:

The experience of family members can affect a young person's attachment to and success in the labor market. Families are important influences as role models and as providers of economic resources that can help young people invest in their own future.

Both family income and parental education affect a person's probability of successful employment: the higher the parents' income and level of educational attainment, the more likely it is that a youth will be employed (Freeman 1989). In families whose adults have a successful employment history, young people can learn from and capitalize on their parents' experiences, sense of accomplishment, and network of contacts. Young people in these families use extended family networks or other contacts to get a foot in the door toward a first job or to secure a first "good" job (Wial 1991). Parents with strong work histories are also good role models, motivating their children even as they share their knowledge and accumulated wisdom about how to get a job, keep it, and move up.

The opposite is true if adults in a family have weak or intermittent attachment to the labor market. The correlation is strong between the failure of adults in

the world of mainstream economic activity and the work history of their offspring. Young people who have a family member in jail are less likely to be working than those who do not. They are also more likely to have committed a crime, which can affect later ability to secure employment (Case and Katz 1990).

Similarly, the intergenerational impacts of poverty and welfare status are powerful. Young women growing up in families on welfare are significantly more likely than those from non-welfare families to be welfare recipients themselves and to have children early. Receipt of public assistance has been found to decrease both the probability that a young person is working and the amount of time that he or she works (Lerman 1986).

These intergenerational family effects have another significant dimension. Research indicates that a jobless man is less likely to marry the mother of his child than a man who is working. Low earnings correlate not only with reduced marriage rates for men but also with a higher incidence of divorce. In this way, high joblessness among urban black men can affect family structure, increasing welfare dependency and the number of female-headed households. This, in turn, creates difficulties in the labor market for children growing up in those families. Since the 1970s, these two trends have gone hand in hand: the increase in the number of young men with low income has been paralleled by a steady increase in the number of children in mother-only families.

Effects due to living and relating to peers and adults in a neighborhood isolated from the mainstream of economic activity:

Neighborhood influences can be an important barrier to the success of disadvantaged urban youth in the labor market. This is the basis of William Julius Wilson's (1987) argument about the "underclass": in certain high-poverty urban neighborhoods, the employment networks, role models, and supports that ease movement into mainstream employment are simply too thin and too disorganized.

Economists have found growing evidence that the activities of friends and peer groups influence an individual's labor market behavior. Having more

friends working increases the odds that a young person will have a job; having more friends on public assistance or who are unemployed due to plant closings lessens the probability of employment (Van Haitsma 1989).

Sociologists have developed a rich analysis of the ways that neighborhood dynamics in distressed communities—peer culture, a lack of responsible adult role models, and limited options for employment and earnings—give rise to and harden an oppositional subculture based on a youth “code of the street” (Anderson 1994). This culture, with its own language, dress code, and patterns of interpersonal relations, provides young people who get little respect (or guidance) elsewhere with an opportunity to negotiate and win respect from peers and to feel valued and part of a community that looks after them. However, this culture, based on notions of respect that are intertwined with violence and aggressive interpersonal relations, stands squarely opposed to the values of mainstream society as represented in both schools and workplaces. Doing well in school appears as giving in and losing respect for those young men (and, increasingly, women) who live by the code of the street or what others have labeled “cool pose” (Majors and Billson 1992).

Adapting to the demands of employers for punctuality, responsibility, and deference is regarded similarly by those who have chosen this route to identity and belonging. As Ronald Mincy (1991) has concluded:

These aggressive interpersonal skills contribute to high rates of suspension, expulsion and other disciplinary sanctions when these youths are in school....The result is lower academic achievement and attainment. Later on, the same interpersonal skills may convince employers that black male employees are more argumentative and less submissive to authority than other employees, and therefore, more difficult to manage.

Elijah Anderson (1990) has emphasized the important role that the “old head” once played in minority communities—and how that role is disappearing in high-poverty minority neighborhoods. These adults of “stable means who believed in hard work, family life, and the church” provided young people

with practical advice and wisdom and served as acknowledged teachers, mentors, and supporters of young black men as they confronted the challenges of work, family life, and citizenship. Today, according to Anderson, as the percentage of urban black males who are steadily employed declines, a “new old head” is emerging on the streets, often a product of gang culture, indifferent to traditional values and the law: “For him, the work ethic does not exist; if he works at the low-paying jobs available to him, he does so grudgingly. More likely, he is employed, either part-time or full, in the drug trade or some other area of the underground economy.”

The lack of legitimate opportunities for success in certain neighborhoods makes the underground economy and illegal activities a more attractive economic option. At the same time, engaging in illegal activities has lost much of its stigma in those communities, and, for some, it is a badge of success, honor, and prestige. These factors are a very real obstacle to efforts to connect young men with a labor market and educational system that have made limited investment in them in the past and returned little, if any, benefit. In a subculture whose faith in the future has been shattered, efforts to rebuild that faith are critical—and must be at the heart of intervention strategies.

Implications for work preparation strategies:

The challenge of overcoming negative influences that may arise from families and communities that are under great stress, are weakly attached to the mainstream economy, and whose coping mechanisms alienate young people from the mainstream is a serious one. Implications for work preparation strategies include:

- **Create opportunities for hope and engagement:**

Counteracting the psychological (and economic) enticements of the oppositional culture of the street and of the drug trade must be a conscious goal of any effort to improve the preparedness for work of the most disconnected young people. Access to a low-wage job with no apparent future or a training program with limited hope of employment is insufficient motivation to draw young people from the margins toward the mainstream. Only by creating an environment that

generates hope and belief in a future in which young people's best efforts make a difference can programs hope to reach young people who have chosen *against* participation in a social and economic order they see as hostile to them.

- **Emphasize positive adult relationships:** Work preparation strategies must be built upon the bedrock of caring and competent relationships with adults. Hope, trust, and belief in a better future are tied to the development of a strong sense of self-worth and validation by those one respects. This happens through relationships that are steady, meaningful, and caring.
 - **Build employment networks by providing work:** Connecting youth to employers—both in and outside the youth labor market—can be an important way to increase access to opportunities and fire young people's imaginations. Work generates income, motivation, a sense of accomplishment, better understanding about careers and what they require, and the possibility of alternative adult role models. People find jobs and decide on careers based on who they know and what they learn from contacts in the labor market. Building these employment networks through education and training programs that emphasize integrating work and learning is critical in communities where attachment to the labor market is weak and limited.
 - **Be ready to provide long-term and intensive support:** Interventions must include a way to provide caring, support, and practical help for an extended period of trust- and skill-building. Overcoming the negative effects of families and communities in stress is difficult. The road is not straight, and progress takes time. For many of the most disconnected and scarred youth, the turnaround is a process of remaking their sense of self, the world, and their relation to it. The scars of intergenerational poverty and despair do not heal quickly.
5. **Weaknesses within youth-serving institutions, plus the lack of coordination and strategic alliances among them, often stymie the efforts of young people to overcome adversity and use community resources to their advantage.**

A final, critically important, barrier to effective workforce preparation and career advancement for urban youth is the weakness and inadequacy of youth-serving institutions and programs in many distressed urban communities. If schools, community-based organizations, government agencies, and other institutions that exist to help young people develop—or to provide them “second chances” to overcome earlier disadvantage—are weak and ineffective, either singly or as a coherent system, then many young people will continue to be mired in failure, frustration, and poor performance in the labor market.

Such weaknesses are often significant. The problem is not a lack of will or desire among those who work with young people: most individual teachers desperately want all their students to learn; most employees of community-based organizations and government agencies are committed to helping people find appropriate services, learn new skills, and succeed.

Nor is the lack of impressive model programs the obstacle. As a nation, we have been good at creating model programs—and many of them have shown promise in helping small numbers of youth advance.

However, youth-serving professionals and individual programs operate within institutions, bureaucracies, and service-delivery systems that are deeply troubled. As Lisbeth Schorr, director of the Harvard Project on Effective Services, writes (1993): “Most programs and institutions meant to provide services and supports to improve young children's lives are fragmented, crisis-driven, and exclusionary.” Their interventions address only certain populations or certain developmental needs. Constantly running to put out fires, they respond to the best of their abilities but with limited tools and strategies. Individually and together, “halfway help” is the norm:

School counselors are so overworked by daily crises they cannot provide inner-city students with the missing connection to the work world.... Child protective workers spend precious hours recording home visits made where no one opened the door and have no time to build relationships with families that would lead them to open the door. Teachers despair of trying

to get help for children who come to school hungry, sick, unprepared, and distracted by problems at home, because even the inadequate help that is available is too difficult from them to mobilize.

Schorr concludes that "most front-line professionals feel so overwhelmed by burgeoning caseloads or class sizes and so constrained by rules and conflicting regulations that they have neither time nor energy to develop the connections that help strengthen families."

In distressed urban communities, the breakdown of service delivery systems is a defining reality. In a recent policy statement, *Rebuilding Inner City Communities*, the Committee for Economic Development (1995) emphasizes the lack of capacity of both informal and formal institutions in distressed communities to help residents "share information, work toward common goals, and acquire needed support." The problems that Lisbeth Schorr enumerates, while they are manifest across the country, are most intractable in cities. Several problems surface again and again: fragmented services, uncoordinated funding streams, and conflicting regulations; inadequate resources for responsive, effective service delivery; and inadequate training and development opportunities for youth-serving staff.

Effects due to fragmented services, uncoordinated funding streams, and conflicting regulations:

The fractured and uncoordinated nature of workforce preparation strategies for both young people and adults has been a hallmark of federal policy and has come under attack from all sides during the past decade. For years, categorical funding streams have targeted particular population groups, and they have been administered in isolation by agencies with responsibility for specific problems, such as housing or education or training or health care. Each intervention has developed its own champions, delivery system, regulations, and funding restrictions. For example, the U.S. General Accounting Office (1994) identified more than 150 employment and training programs administered by 14 federal agencies. The resulting incompatible and sometimes contradictory eligibility requirements and operating cycles made it virtually impossible for local service providers to integrate resources and

coordinate planning. As the GAO concluded, "Despite decades of efforts to better coordinate employment training programs, conflicting requirements continue to make it difficult for program staff to coordinate activities and share resources."

The fault lies not only with the dynamics of federal politics. Our society values specialization and well-defined divisions of labor. Professionals want to protect their jobs to reap financial and social benefit from their expertise, so they reinforce the tendency toward fragmented delivery systems. So, too, does the advocacy process, contributing to the problem. In seeking to become expert in defending and advancing the interests of certain populations, advocates narrow their focus to, say, pregnant teenagers or homeless veterans.

Effects due to inadequate resources for responsive, effective service delivery:

Fragmented planning and delivery relate to the second obstacle to effective services in urban communities: the inadequacy of funding. This hallmark of publicly funded services for the disadvantaged will only worsen in the coming years. In education, particularly in states without equalized funding for rich and poor districts, urban students typically attend schools that desperately need physical renovation, they sit at the feet of inadequately paid teachers, and they learn with inadequate materials, books, and equipment (Kozol 1991). Increases in funding for public education in the past thirty years, while significant, have targeted social goals, such as nutrition programs, educating the handicapped, and busing for integration (Rothstein 1993). Spending increases to raise teacher salaries and reduce class size have been too small to produce educational effects.

Resources are also woefully inadequate in other programs and systems that prepare urban young people for the future. Fragmented funding streams contribute to the resource challenge by institutionalizing inefficiencies in administration and service delivery. However, absolute resource constraints are real—and contribute to the lack of coordination and comprehensive service delivery. In 1994, year-round public-training programs funded through the Department of Labor served only about 3 percent of

the 25 million Americans between the ages of 16 and 55 eligible for federal job-training programs targeted to the poor (U.S. Department of Labor 1994b). Because of limited funds, the intensity of training programs falls far short of what is needed to change attitudes, behaviors, and labor market opportunities for most disadvantaged participants. The inadequacy of available funds ensures that youth-serving institutions will engage in triage, serving fewer people than need services, in programs of limited scope and scale. It also exacerbates turf battles, as institutions struggle to compete for scarce and shrinking resources.

Effects due to inadequate training and development opportunities for youth-serving staff:

The third key challenge that has stymied education and, to an even greater degree, job-training efforts for young people is staff development. In schools, once the classroom door closes, the quality of learning depends upon the teacher's ability and resourcefulness. For young teachers still learning their trade and older teachers trained years ago, innovations in pedagogy or in working with particular groups of students will not be adopted simply because the superintendent advocates it. The front-line workers—teachers—must have opportunities to experiment, practice, reflect on their performance, and work with their peers in a learning environment. This is difficult to achieve in schools, and it is particularly difficult in urban systems whose resources are stretched and where union rules may constrain the reallocation of teacher time. It requires creative approaches to school schedules and leadership in the school building committed to making the development of staff capacity a high priority so that staff development is an ongoing part of the job, not just a few days of isolated summer workshops (Phleger and Kaufman 1992).

Professional development issues are even more challenging in the field of youth employment and training. Youth work is a young field, not yet professionalized. There is no certification or formal training for youth employment professionals. Wages are low, turnover is high, and funding formulas make it difficult for programs to invest in management training. At best, Andrew Hahn notes (1995), the field is "a para-professional enterprise

and there are few standards for staff and programs." Decentralized, underfunded, and seen by many as a field to work in for a few years but not a career, youth employment is in great need of professional development strategies that move beyond conference-going to address complex issues of youth development, economic trends and work-related skills, curriculum and instruction, and program quality. How to institutionalize effective staff development is a real challenge—and is likely to become even more daunting in an era of reduced federal funding and tighter budgets.

Implications for work preparation strategies:

The balkanized and chaotic non-system of services and institutions serving young people poses a serious challenge to provision of effective supports and assistance. The following proposals for redressing this long-standing barrier emphasize both national policy and local community efforts.

- **Build public engagement campaigns into work preparation efforts:** It is crucial to address the public's disaffection with federal spending on social programs. Resource challenges will become more acute until greater faith in the good intentions and promising results of programs and systemic reforms can be generated.
- **Prepare for building a new system based on local practice and state and local policies:** Congress has proposed consolidation of programs and devolution of responsibility to the states as the organizing principles for workforce preparation legislation. This creates an opportunity and a challenge: to design a state-managed, locally designed system that is less fragmented, more comprehensive, and more driven by the needs of young people, rather than those of particular organizations or agencies.
- **Encourage comprehensive planning at the community level:** For years, foundations and government have encouraged experimentation with different local-level approaches to more systemic and comprehensive planning and service delivery strategies. These experiments must continue. As of yet, there is little clarity on the models and methods that can lessen fragmentation in ways that are non-bureaucratic, flexible, and inclusive.

- **Strengthen the capacity of youth-serving organizations and institutions:** Any organization that is a leader in its field invests significantly in the skills and knowledge of its core staff. Schools, community-based organizations, and local governments should learn from the private sector the importance and the best methods for ongoing professional development and training that will strengthen their ability to serve young people well, incorporate new methods and approaches, and work more effectively with others.

Conclusion: Toward New Approaches to Addressing Multiple Barriers

The multiple and interrelated barriers identified above are the reality which programmatic and policy innovations must address. In this chapter, we have

emphasized not only the powerful independent effects on disadvantaged youth of each of these barriers, but also the complex ways in which they reinforce each other. At the same time, we have proposed priorities for new initiatives and policies, based on the obstacles to success that exist on both the demand-side and the supply-side of the urban youth labor market—and in the connections between the two.

In the next chapter, we turn from problem statements to an assessment of the effectiveness of different strategies which have been introduced to address one or more of the barriers identified above. From this analysis, we derive lessons for future programming and policy, lessons that are presented in the final chapter of this report.

Lessons from Research and Practice: What Works?

What do research and practice tell us about strategies to overcome the interrelated challenges that make it difficult for many urban youth to advance into adult jobs and responsibilities? What has been learned over the years about both public-sector and private-sector efforts to make it more likely that disadvantaged youth—in-school and out-of-school—will succeed in the labor market?

In the fields of social and economic policy, the most extensive research on program effectiveness concerns employment and training. During recent decades, programs to address the *skill deficiencies* of disadvantaged youth and adults have been subject to many careful social science experiments, as well as other, less rigorous, evaluations of outcomes, impacts, and implementation. The information on the costs and benefits of these efforts is also relatively reliable. To inform the recommendations proposed in Chapter 4, this chapter summarizes the central lessons from this research base on employment and training programs and school-based efforts to prepare young people for careers and employment.

Unfortunately, data are far thinner and less instructive on the effectiveness of strategies to address the many *non-skill barriers* that urban youth encounter as they seek to advance into adult jobs and responsibilities. Research has lagged, plagued by methodological challenges and by a lack of funding or champions for more careful assessments of outcomes and impacts. We begin this chapter with an overview of some of the existing findings on efforts to overcome the barriers described in the last chapter. Because of the relative scarcity of solid research in this areas, the treatment is far more abbreviated and suggestive than the summary of research on supply-side, skill-oriented programs will be.

The Effectiveness of Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Employment Opportunities and Economic Development

There is remarkably little research—and no consensus—on effective strategies for improving job opportunities for disadvantaged adults or youth. In fact, there is hardly a consensus on what “jobs policy” means or what kinds of strategies to include when assessing U.S. employment policy.¹¹

The most important U.S. policies affecting employment do so indirectly. These are the regulatory and macroeconomic fiscal, monetary, and tax policies designed to improve the functioning of the economy as a whole. In addition, an array of federal programs attempts to create jobs or stimulate economic development. These

¹¹ Material in this section comes from *Federal Jobs Policy: History, Current Status, and Future Challenges*, prepared by Jobs for the Future, Mt. Auburn Associates, Nancy Nye, Brandon Roberts, and Richard Schramm for the Neighborhood Funders Group (Jobs for the Future et al. 1996).

include programs aimed at small business expansion, enterprise development, self-employment, industrial competitiveness, technology development, and export assistance. At times during the past few decades, the federal government has also tried to improve employment opportunities for disadvantaged workers by targeting economic development programs to distressed communities or jobs to individuals facing special barriers to employment.

According to a recent review of the literature prepared for the Neighborhood Funders Group, rigorous research on the effectiveness of targeted economic development programs is almost non-existent (Jobs for the Future et al. 1996). The authors conclude:

There is virtually no literature that assesses the effectiveness of geographically or socioeconomically targeted federal economic development measures in a systematic or comprehensive fashion. Policy evaluations tend to measure outputs of particular programs, looking at such measures as the number of jobs created or the number of housing units created.

Based on a survey of the evidence, the study highlighted several lessons about targeted economic development strategies:

- To reach any degree of scale in creating new jobs requires a variety of approaches, including self-employment and microenterprise development, business retention, small-business expansion, and limited business recruitment. Self-employment and microenterprise programs alone create relatively few jobs paying a family wage, particularly in the short term.
- Efforts that focus on the trade sector—businesses that export goods and services outside the community—have the potential to generate more jobs for local residents than do retail activities, which often simply shift local consumer spending from one establishment to another.
- Economic development strategies must look beyond neighborhood boundaries to the regional economy in which low-income neighborhoods are imbedded.
- Economic development strategies must be market-based, emerging from a realistic assessment

of opportunities and challenges offered by the local and regional economy.

- Economic development efforts are most likely to benefit low-income individuals when the workforce needs of industry coincide with the goal of providing jobs for low-income residents (e.g., when they focus on industry sectors experiencing difficulty attracting new low-skill and semi-skilled workers).
- Strong community-based organizations—with the capacity to implement business development strategies and operate on an equal footing with private actors and government agencies—are fundamental to the success of efforts to create jobs and access to employment for low-income residents. Strong organizations improve the potential for targeting jobs to poorer neighborhoods and residents.

Background research for the Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative drew similar conclusions. A study conducted for the Foundation by Rainbow Research highlighted the lack both of a consensus on "what works" and of rigorous evaluation studies (Dewar and Scheie 1995). Still, the authors found that promising models tend to share common characteristics paralleling the findings above. Such programs are market-oriented, designed to empower the target population, networked rather than isolated, integrative and boundary-crossing (in terms of geography and services provided), and community-based. Growing out of this and other research, the Jobs Initiative initially identified the following promising strategies (Annie E. Casey Foundation 1994):

- **Employment brokering:** efforts to improve the flow of information on the local labor market through close relationships with both employers and local residents looking for work;
- **Human-services job creation:** targeting employment opportunities created through human service expenditures in urban communities (e.g., child care, home health, foster parenting);
- **Sectoral initiatives:** interventions that strengthen clusters of firms in economic and employment niches in local economies that have growth potential, career ladders, and strong demand for entry-level workers;

- **Spatial mobility:** strategies designed to connect urban residents in need of employment with good jobs available in the suburbs, often combining transportation, brokering, and human services;
- **Capitalization and/or enterprise development:** efforts to increase the availability of capital for new businesses and business retention within or near poorer urban communities, with special focus on minority-owned firms; and
- **Jobs policy networks:** local partnerships that advocate for policy reforms that can increase access to employment, and improve program design and delivery, and increase the local commitment to innovative anti-poverty efforts.

The Effectiveness of Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Families and Neighborhoods

In recent years, research has shed significant light on the ways that multiple and interactive family and neighborhood factors shape individual outcomes. "Rotten outcomes"—school failure, criminal behavior, substance abuse, teen pregnancy—are frequently intertwined and more common in poor families and in distressed neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated. Community organizers and service deliverers have long known this. Consequently, there has been significant experimentation with different approaches to strengthening families and neighborhoods.

Families

The best family-strengthening policies would increase the employment and earnings of poor families. In general, though, family-strengthening efforts focus on providing assistance to poor parents so they can better cope with the stresses of their lives, help their children develop, and keep their families together. Three kinds of programs have been evaluated in this context: family support, family preservation, and teen parenting.

Family support programs are designed to help parents form functional and emotional attachments to other parents—and through those attachments to improve their own parenting skills and ability to find employment and raise their earnings. When well-implemented, these programs enhance the emotional well-being of parents, broaden their social networks,

and facilitate child development (National Research Council 1993). By imparting caregiving skills and helping parents cope with stress in their lives, innovative programs help parents develop personal networks that enable them to solve family problems themselves and increase family cohesion. However, these efforts generally target families with younger children rather than adolescents.

Family preservation or "homebuilder" programs address the challenges facing parents who can't care for their children, who risk placement in foster care, or other supervised settings. In these programs, a case manager provides intensive short-term counseling and parent education and arranges for other services for the family members as needed. Evaluations of the effectiveness of these interventions yield no firm conclusions. There is some evidence that results are better for families with young children. The Tacoma, Washington, homebuilder program documented enough success that the savings from averted placements more than compensated for the cost of the staff-intensive intervention (Schorr 1993).

A third family-oriented intervention focuses on teenage parents. By design, these efforts are comprehensive in order to deal with the many hurdles standing between teen mothers and self-sufficiency. Two demonstrations which have been evaluated carefully are Project Redirection and New Chance; both provided very low-income teenage parents with educational and support services, parenting workshops, counseling, and mentoring.

Project Redirection showed evidence of moderately better outcomes than a comparison group after five years on measures of weekly wages, welfare receipt, and parenting skills, although about half the participants still received AFDC, and only one in three had full-time employment (Polit et al. 1985). New Chance, a voluntary program in 16 sites, enrolled a more disadvantaged group: 95 percent of the teen mothers were also high school dropouts. Eighteen months after entry into the program, participants showed no improvement in literacy test scores or employment and no reduction in welfare receipt (though there was a significant increase in GED receipt and researchers cautioned that some outcomes might improve over time) (Quint et al. 1994).

Neighborhoods

The United States has a long tradition of neighborhood initiatives to address poverty (Halpern 1995). Since the Progressive Era, reformers, government, foundations, and others have exhibited cycles of interest in assisting the poor by strengthening their neighborhoods and connecting them more fully to the mainstream of American society and economic life. In the 1950s, these efforts centered on the physical renewal of neighborhoods. In the 1960s, comprehensive service planning combined with empowerment mechanisms characterized the Community Action and Model Cities programs, while community economic development strategies began to mature in the 1970s.

In recent years, a new generation of initiatives has emerged that build on the past while trying to address some shortcomings of earlier strategies. These new efforts, known in policy and research circles as "comprehensive community initiatives" (CCIs), are designed to combine, coordinate, and achieve synergies among different community-level interventions: social services and supports, health care, mental health, job training, leadership development. The goal is to improve individual, family, and community circumstances in poor neighborhoods or cities (Connell et al. 1995).

As Robert Halpern (1995:197) writes of comprehensive community initiatives:

Hallmarks of the new initiatives include comprehensiveness, that is, an effort to address all aspects of neighborhood life and residents' support needs, attention to both tangible and intangible aspects of neighborhood life (i.e., pride and psychological investment in the neighborhood as well as housing, services, etc.), partnerships between neighborhood-based organizations and either or both government and the private sector, and the development of some type of representative governance entity.

Evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives poses great challenges because they are designed to affect the well-being of an entire community, not simply those residents who have been subject to a particular program or "treatment." Moreover, the

initiatives work across different service systems and sectors, and they target changes at the levels of individual, family, and community. Also, economic and political factors outside the neighborhood greatly influence their success. As a result of all these factors, it is difficult to define and collect measures that can capture the various institutional and interpersonal changes that CCI planners seek.

While evaluation evidence is limited, the Casey Foundation's own New Futures initiative is perhaps the best-documented and assessed of these efforts. This is partly because New Futures was one of the earliest CCIs and partly because the Foundation was committed to learning from its investment. The five-year initiative provided five mid-sized cities with between 5 million and 12.5 million dollars each to improve the life chances of disadvantaged youth. Centered around an institutional change strategy, it required participating communities to create a new, broadly representative local governance collaborative that would force the realignment of service-delivery systems and make incoherent and fragmented service provision more youth-centered and responsive. Each city was to focus on four measurable outcomes: lowering the school dropout rate; improving student academic performance; reducing teen pregnancy and births; and increasing the number of youth going on to college or a job after high school (Center for the Study of Social Policy 1995).

In none of the communities was measurable progress achieved on the four targeted outcomes. The nature of the intervention—a representative local planning collaborative—proved too weak in and of itself to force the kinds of changes that had been encouraged among existing institutions and systems. The collaboratives ultimately stepped back from comprehensive programming and system reform, choosing instead to fund discrete interventions. New relationships and information systems took root in the communities, and several of the collaboratives have survived and matured. However, the goal of a comprehensive initiative proved more difficult than initially thought, demanding longer-term investments and stronger "vertical" connections between service providers and political decision makers at the local and state levels.

Researchers and program designers see New Futures as instructive for future CCI efforts. According to the New Futures evaluators, "The next generation of community-based collaboratives needs to engage in more ongoing strategic and operational planning" so that more appropriate and effective strategies are devised and implemented.

Similarly, the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families argues that CCIs incorporate "the best of what we believe has been learned from recent social programs and economic development efforts to improve the lives of children and families" (Connell et al. 1995:17):

1. They combine the social, economic, and physical spheres.
2. They recognize the critical role of "community building" and community participation.
3. They recognize that poor communities need financial, political, and technical resources that lie outside the community.
4. They recognize that improvements in the public sector's systems of support must be complemented by activities in both the private and non-profit sectors.
5. They recognize that the desired changes will require sustained investment over a long period of time.

The Effectiveness of Efforts to Address Barriers Related to Employer Attitudes and Behaviors

Efforts to change employer attitudes and behaviors regarding certain employer groups are primarily of two kinds: those generated by employers themselves and those pressed upon employers by adversarial community groups.

Individual firms, and employers more broadly, have acquired significant experience with efforts to value and promote diversity through training for management, supervisors, and front-line workers. A healthy industry has sprouted up to provide businesses with consulting services on the legal, management, and interpersonal issues associated with bias in recruiting, hiring, and management. While little

evaluation has been done on these interventions, the business community appears to believe the results are worth the investment.

The second approach to changing employer attitudes and behaviors comes from jobs campaigns orchestrated by community groups. Community groups have tried to pressure employers to hire from certain neighborhoods or to give preference in hiring to black or other ethnic groups. At least since the days of Jesse Jackson's PUSH in Chicago, these efforts have targeted large employers in a regional economy (such as Coca-Cola in Atlanta) or firms and projects that receive public funds (including construction contractors for convention centers or municipal airports). Some groups have conducted or sponsored "hiring audits" to illustrate racial disparities in the hiring practices of local employers.

Within traditional youth employment or youth development programs, however, there is little experience with strategies for increasing employer sensitivity to young people from different groups or for altering their practices through ongoing dialogue and education. At various times, the federal government has given employers subsidies to encourage the hiring of disadvantaged youth, but the take-up rate has been low. These efforts rarely changed employer attitudes; in fact, they may have confirmed employers' beliefs about the low productive value of certain populations.

In the context of providing work experience for young people, the school-to-career movement has generated training and learning opportunities for supervisors and human resource professionals that begin to address employer attitudes and behaviors. And, for some employers, just having young people around and seeing how they perform begins to change stereotypes and expectations. Recent surveys of employers suggest that while attitudes about young people and their work ethic are generally quite negative, the attitudes of those who have participated in school-to-career programs are far more positive and supportive (Zemsky 1994). However, systematic evaluation of the impact of school-to-work programs on employer attitudes toward youth has yet to emerge.

The Effectiveness of Work Preparation Strategies

Ten Lessons from Research

Rigorous evaluation of national employment and training initiatives for the disadvantaged emerged in the 1960s, becoming relatively sophisticated in the 1980s. On the whole, the results of these studies have been discouraging: with little variation, federally funded employment training programs have done little, if anything, to improve the earnings and employment trajectories of disadvantaged youth. For adults, the evidence suggests modest earnings gains from many training programs, though only limited success in raising disadvantaged adults out of poverty. Moreover, earnings benefits appear to erode by the fourth and fifth years after enrollment in a program.¹²

For young people, particularly minority youth, the intensive, residential Job Corps has long been singled out as the rare intervention that appears able to improve employment and earnings. A recent study of participants in Youth Corps demonstrations, which combine paid employment in community service projects with training, basic remedial education and life skills courses, has found encouraging impacts on out-of-school youth. Outcomes were particularly positive among African American males, who work more, earn more, vote more, have lower arrest rates and are more likely to earn an associate degree than their peers (Abt Associates 1996). Four programs that have been evaluated through rigorous random-assignment studies—JTPA, JOBSTART, STEP, and Supported Work—failed to have long-term positive impacts on disadvantaged youth. Preliminary results from studies of two recent demonstrations for young mothers—the Teen Parent Demonstration and New Chance—suggest that these programs are having some positive educational impacts but not the hoped-for effect of reducing participants' subsequent child-bearing (U.S. Department of Labor 1995).

The National JTPA Study of program impacts, conducted by Abt Associates, drew a dark conclusion

about employment and training programming for out-of-school youth: "There were no statistically significant positive effects on the earnings of out-of-school youths, male or female, regardless of the service strategy for which they were recommended" (Bloom et al. 1994:5). Evaluations of "welfare-to-work" programs have found very limited success at raising the incomes of program participants, and almost no success at moving participants out of poverty (Gueron and Pauly 1991).

During the past decade, these fairly consistent results have contributed to declining public support for federal training programs (which was never particularly robust). Media and policymakers, looking at the evidence, have trumpeted the mantra: "Nothing works" in employment and training. The implication is that public intervention can do little to alleviate urban poverty.

Among practitioners working with young people, however, dissatisfaction with the formal evaluation literature has grown. In particular, these advocates voice three criticisms. First, the evaluations simply confirm what practitioners have long known, that perfunctory, inadequately funded, and insufficiently intensive programs have little effect, especially on disadvantaged youth and adults with serious, multiple problems. Second, global studies of effectiveness hide successes and encouraging outcomes at certain program sites. And, finally, studies focused on measurable, quantitative outcomes typically do not look "inside the black box" of program design and implementation and cannot explain much about why certain programs are more successful than others.

Practitioners do not believe that "nothing works." Indeed, they feel they have a good understanding of what it takes to build and run a successful program—and of the obstacles that must be overcome to succeed routinely. Most researchers, too, are unwilling to concede that nothing works. The evaluation literature yields important "do's and don'ts." When these lessons are linked with the experience

¹² Dr. Judith Taylor conducted much of the research for this section. She prepared a background literature review on the evaluation findings on adult and youth training programs, welfare-to-work initiatives, and school-based work preparation efforts.

of practitioners, the combination yields an extremely helpful guide toward more effective programming.

In the following pages, we distill key lessons from the evaluation literature and from several decades of practitioner experience with work preparation programs for young people, both in-school and out-of-school. The evaluation literature is weighted toward employment and training programs, which have a relatively rich tradition of methodologically rigorous social science experiments. In contrast, studies of school-based initiatives, such as vocational education, dropout prevention, and school-to-work transition programs, have tended not to use formal impact analysis, in part because of the methodological difficulties of studies requiring experimental and control groups.

Taken together, the two bodies of knowledge and expertise—one experimental, the other experiential; one on employment and training, the other on school-based education programs—tend toward a consensus on ten lessons that should inform the next generation of policy and practice.

Two overarching lessons stand out:

- Modest interventions are likely to have modest and short-lived impacts on people's lives and their ability to succeed in the labor market.
- Second-class systems yield second-class results. Programs for in-school and out-of-school youth must aim toward the same long-term goal: mastery of challenging academic standards and career-related competencies that enable all participants to advance and succeed in both postsecondary education and career employment.

A second group of findings relates to pedagogy—to methods of teaching that appear to hold promise as core elements of learning programs for disadvantaged youth. These programs address instructional methods and approaches both within classroom settings and in the incorporation of workplaces and other community settings into learning.

- Traditional didactic teaching methods fail significant numbers of young people. These methods are particularly ill-suited for many students from disadvantaged, minority, and immigrant households.

- Work is a powerful motivator and catalyst for learning and effort when provided in a supportive and learning-rich context; but work experience and academic rigor must be combined if work-based learning is to be of maximum benefit to young people.

A third set of lessons revolves around basic design principles that have been shown to improve program effectiveness. These relate to the attention work preparation efforts pay to employers and the local labor market, the developmental needs of adolescents and young adults, and relationships with competent, caring adults.

- A strong, direct connection to, and understanding of, the local labor market and its employers is critical.
- Work preparation strategies for young people must take into account their developmental needs and provide activities and services that address those needs.
- Strong relationships with competent, caring adults are essential.

Finally, three deceptively simple, yet quite important, implementation lessons emerge from research and practice.

- Program impacts of program design on different population subgroups vary greatly, with males tending to have less positive outcomes than females.
- The quality of implementation matters greatly.
- It takes time for results to appear.

The following pages summarize the evidence supporting each of these findings.

Two Guiding Principles

- 1. Modest interventions are likely to have modest and short-lived impacts on people's lives and their ability to succeed in the labor market.**

Because of funding constraints and political pressures to spread limited resources to reach more participants, youth employment training programs tend to be relatively short and to stand alone, with no continuity of service or intervention for participants. Summer jobs programs rarely connect to year-round supports and services. School-year pro-

gramming is limited in duration and intensity. Yet, young people eligible for programs usually struggle with multiple disadvantages: they may be high school dropouts, have low reading abilities, be teen parents, or live in families mired in extreme poverty. As the U.S. Department of Labor (1994a) has noted, "An intervention lasting three or four months is not going to be able to turn around 16 years of accumulated problems." And, as many studies have found, short-term gains from program participation tend to erode and disappear in the years that follow (Friedlander and Burtless 1995).

Many of the same problems exist in schools, despite their being almost year-round, full-day institutions. The "intervention" of school is often more modest and less holistic than it might at first appear. While secondary schools house young people many hours a day, the overall experience is generally disjointed and incoherent—creating what has been labeled the "shopping mall high school" (Powell et al. 1985). There is little integration between courses and little time or incentive for teachers to coordinate classes. For many years, school improvement programs targeted to disadvantaged populations were add-on or pull-out programs that focused on eligible individuals, not the overall quality of their educational program. For example, compensatory education programs funded by federal Chapter I dollars typically paid for reading specialists who might work half an hour at a time with eligible students; they rarely supported strategies to better the quality of teaching and learning for the whole school. New regulations encourage whole-school strategies, but undoing the legacy of two decades of pull-out programs (and associated staffing commitments) is slow.

Researchers and practitioners have concluded that youth programming—both in and out of school—must become more *intensive, continuous, and varied*.

Intensity: While the evidence is limited, there are some indications that intensity does indeed make a difference in long-term impacts. For example, an analysis of the JOBSTART demonstration that separated participants into three groups based on the number of hours they participated in program activities found a clear pattern: the earnings impact

for the top third was "very large;" gains for the middle group were modest; and they were negative for the bottom third (Cave et al. 1993).

The Job Corps record, one of the few bright spots in youth employment training programming, supports this argument as well. The average stay in this residential program for disadvantaged young people, some 80 percent of whom are high school dropouts and the majority of whom are male, is 7.5 months. A 1985 evaluation found that graduates had significantly better earnings and educational attainment. Welfare dependency and incidence of serious crimes both declined (Mallar et al. 1982). Observers credit the program's intensity, length, and residential nature, which puts young people in a temporary community that supports and rewards responsibility and achievement.

Continuity: Based on evaluation literature and field experience with federally funded youth programs, many in the field advocate replacing the paradigm of workforce preparation as a one-time intervention with an emphasis on "a sequence of services that extends over time" (Curnan and Melchior 1994). The life circumstances of disadvantaged youth are typically changing and unstable: a young person may be able to participate in a program for some time but then have to drop out for economic or personal reasons. When that youth wants help again, mechanisms should be available to reintegrate her or him into existing services and programs. And if a person successfully completes one program, an understandable road map to other services should lead further toward employability and a career. To move in this direction will require significant practical changes, including: community-wide management-information and case-management systems; interagency partnerships to coordinate the design and delivery of comprehensive services; flexible exit and entry within programs and across them; and post-placement follow-up and services that treat individual programs as one element in a sequence of experiences related to work preparation.

Variety: Young people need to be able to choose among work preparation program options and interventions. Each individual has his or her own

set of strengths, weaknesses, and priorities. For some, the primary issue is skills; for others, it is child care, or substance abuse, or problems with the justice system. In addition, individuals are attracted to different learning settings and combinations of program components. A mix of programs—educational, recreational, cultural, sports—is needed if young people are to feel they are being heard and helped, as opposed to feeling shoe-horned into existing programs. This mix would include opportunities provided by mainstream public schools, alternative high schools for returning students, youth organizations, community colleges, and a range of innovative partnerships among private, public, and non-profit institutions.

In addition, programs must be available that serve young people who exhibit different levels of readiness for employment. For example, some youth can benefit greatly from access to an organization that links them with available jobs. Others require long-term interventions that build confidence and competence before they will be ready to keep a job.

The Department of Labor (1994a) has suggested that the *perception* of a critical mass of opportunities and activities for disadvantaged youth in a particular neighborhood may contribute more to long-term impacts than does the quality of any specific program. If young people feel that local institutions and services are visible, varied, and growing, they may be more hopeful about their own prospects and those of their neighborhood. This "saturation" approach has been at the heart of the Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor for a few years; its successor, Youth Fair Chance (defunded by Congress in the 1995 rescission bill); and strategies evolving in the Empowerment Zone/Enterprising Communities Initiative.

2. **Second-class systems yield second-class results.** Programs for in-school and out-of-school youth must aim toward the same long-term goal: mastery of challenging academic standards and career-related competencies that enable all participants to advance and succeed in postsecondary education and career employment.

Two distinct systems of work preparation for young people have long coexisted: one for those enrolled in school; the other for youth who are out-of-school and out-of-work—school dropouts in need of a "second chance." However, the second-chance system has always been a second-class system. It has operated under a different set of goals and performance measures than have schools and with a much shorter time-frame for dealing with the skill and learning needs of participants. Many youth programs have made preparation for the General Equivalency Degree (GED) exam a sufficient educational goal. They have treated entry into and success in postsecondary learning as an unrealistic goal, given program resources and staffing and given basic skill and other learning challenges facing many participants.

Yet, evidence on training program outcomes, combined with evidence on the economic payoff for educational attainment, argue against this two-tier approach. It is increasingly evident that the graduates of a system geared to second-class outcomes are likely to be stuck in second-class jobs and opportunities—and that postsecondary education is critically important to improved employment and earnings.

As the skill levels demanded by employers across the economy rise, more and more jobs require applicants to have formal schooling beyond high school. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, professional, managerial and technical jobs will account for 60 percent of job growth through 2005; while these job categories will comprise a growing percentage of the nation's jobs, clerical, operative and craft jobs will represent a shrinking proportion of total employment (Bishop 1996). Without the ability to succeed in postsecondary learning, young people's options will be limited, and their prospects slim for getting and staying out of poverty.

Still, many work preparation programs for out-of-school youth prepare participants to pass the GED exam. Recent research has shown that a GED provides an edge in the labor market compared to trying to find work as a high school dropout. Over time, GED recipients appear to earn higher wages and work more hours than dropouts (Murnane et al. 1993). However, these positive effects do not make

the GED a desirable endpoint. GED programs are unlikely to increase cognitive abilities because the average time spent in preparation for the exam is about 30 hours. (Three-fourths of candidates spend 100 hours or less preparing for the test.) In the New Chance and GAIN demonstrations, program participation increased GED receipt significantly—without improving the literacy test scores of participants.

In addition, earning more than a typical dropout far from guarantees an escape from poverty. The average wages of black 25-year-olds with a GED are below the poverty line for a family of three (Murnane et al. 1993). For whites and Hispanics, the situation is only slightly better. Moreover, the traditional instructional methods of the typical GED classroom—passive learning, “teaching to the test”—drives many enrollees who have already failed in conventional classrooms to fail again and abandon the program without taking and passing the exam.

GED recipients who do the best appear to be those who obtain the degree because they need it for further education and training. As a certification of basic skills for those who lack the high school sheepskin, the GED can make a difference (U.S. Department of Labor 1995). But this reality merely reinforces the basic point: all young people need to obtain sufficient skills—in school, through community-based second-chance programs, or in any way they can—so they are not shut out of further education and training. All learning and work preparation programs must lead toward the same goal: performance at a high enough level of proficiency and mastery that multiple career options open to participants, including career paths that require two-year or four-year college degrees.

Pedagogy that Works

3. Traditional didactic teaching methods fail significant numbers of young people. These methods are particularly ill-suited for many students from disadvantaged, minority, and immigrant households.

Traditional methods of instruction—often called teacher-centered or “skills and drills” instruction—have come under attack in recent years. Cognitive scientists have identified a range of different individual

learning styles, and they stress that many individuals do not learn easily or effectively through traditional classroom methods of passive learning, lectures, and presentations (Gardner 1983; Berryman and Bailey 1992). In addition, observers who feel that schools must do a better job teaching “soft” skills note that the individualized nature of traditional instruction and its priority on “getting the answer right” bear little resemblance to the new workplace, which is increasingly characterized by teamwork, collaboration, learning from errors, and continuous improvement (Stasz et al. 1992).

The “skills and drills” approach is particularly ill-suited to many low-income, minority, and immigrant students. According to Norton Grubb (1995b) of the University of California at Berkeley, conventional schooling is a “passage through a thicket of opportunities for making mistakes” and the “experience of deficiency comes earlier and more frequently to lower-class children” because of a mix of limited parental capacity to help children learn, the negative effects of peer and neighborhood norms, and teacher biases against certain groups of students. With its emphasis on individual performance, conventional instruction plays directly into the resistance of many urban youth, particularly boys, to authority figures (Ogbu 1978; Willis 1977). They don’t see the payoff to working hard; they aren’t motivated by teacher disapproval or low grades; and they don’t think that performance in school will affect their employment prospects significantly (MacLeod 1995). As a result, school is demotivating and alienating, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy, anger, and frustration.

In contrast, more and more education and training reformers agree on the motivational power of active learning that emphasizes the value of an individual’s own experiences and that provides opportunities for students to discover, create, explore, and find meaning through self-directed efforts (Sizer 1984; Steinberg 1997). Project-based learning, instructional methods that stress “student as worker” and “teacher as coach,” and other pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and credit young people for their life experiences and abilities can motivate and engage many youth for whom traditional instructional methods fail. Curriculum and instructional methods

that use occupations and work-related learning as vehicles for experiential and project-based learning—what Grubb (after John Dewey) labels “education through occupations”—have the potential to be particularly effective in urban schools, with their high concentrations of disadvantaged and often disengaged students.

4. Work is a powerful motivator and catalyst for learning and effort when provided in a supportive and learning-rich context, but work experience and academic rigor must be combined if work-based learning is to be of maximum benefit to young people.

There is a growing consensus that academic learning and work experience should be two linked elements in a single workforce preparation strategy for young people. This is the current thinking among many working with out-of-school populations, and it is consistent with the logic of the school-to-career movement. This conclusion reflects findings from research and practice on the limitations of strategies that focus on either one or the other and from suggestive results of efforts to integrate the two.

Work experience alone: The potential value of work experience as part of a workforce development agenda is obvious. When well-conceived, work experience can provide young people with financial support for subsistence needs, access to better jobs than they could get through their own initiative, and the opportunity to build a work history and personal jobs network that make getting the next job easier. It can also be source of socialization that breaks the isolation and segregation of young people by race and class in their neighborhoods and peer groups; a motivational lesson in the value of and payoff to hard work and long-term career planning; and an opportunity to develop skills, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment.

Yet work experience alone appears to have limited success in improving the education outcomes or employability of disadvantaged youth. Even subsidized employment opportunities have yielded little once the subsidized jobs ended.

This was the primary finding of the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project (YIEPP). This multi-site

demonstration conducted between 1978 and 1981 guaranteed full-time summer jobs and part-time school-year minimum-wage jobs to disadvantaged 16- to 19-year-olds who stayed in school. While the program raised employment rates for disadvantaged minorities significantly during the subsidized period, neither school enrollment nor high school graduation rates rose. Long-term employability results were at best modest (U.S. Department of Labor 1995). These results mirror other studies of work experience alone, unaccompanied by a learning component or supports, including the Supported Work Demonstrations, Neighborhood Youth Corps, and the California Conservation Corps (Smith and Gambone 1992).

Basic education alone or as a prerequisite to training and work experience: The evidence on literacy gains from remedial programming is mixed. Remedial education for out-of-school youth typically focuses on earning a General Equivalency Diploma, which accounts for about 15 percent of the flow of new high school graduates nationally. GED recipients appear to earn 5 to 10 percent more than high school dropouts. However, this difference may be due to the motivation and qualities of GED-takers, and the effect of the GED as a credential opening gates to further education, rather than the education or training program *per se*. In the New Chance experiment, which targeted drop-out teenage mothers, interim results found that GED attainment increased dramatically—but literacy test scores did not.

It is common for workforce preparation programs to sequence education and training as separate components—classroom learning first, followed by training and work as a “reward” for students who clear the classroom hurdle. This rarely works well. Many participants drop out before completing the course: 36 percent of adult basic and secondary education program participants leave before completing 12 hours of instruction; 40 hours of instruction is the median (Department of Labor 1995). This sequencing can be quite alienating for those who need to earn and learn and those who failed classroom learning in the past.

Integration of work and learning: A growing body of evidence indicates that linking academic learning

and work in an integrated way can benefit both in-school and out-of-school populations. Hopeful signs come from studies of contextual learning at the workplace, work experience of high school students; and new school-to-career programs.

Learning at the workplace: Practitioners are looking toward the integration of basic education with workplace literacy. Workplace-based adult basic education programs that attempt to teach literacy skills, often integrating literacy training and work tasks, show some indications of positive impacts (Mikulecky and Drew 1991). A study of a basic skills program, targeted to educationally disadvantaged youth, at a Boston bank found that graduates had earnings and employment patterns comparable to better-educated workers (Hargroves 1989).

In general, the evaluation literature has found that programs that combine treatments—work experience, training, and remedial education in one package—appear to have the best results (DeLone 1992). Job Corps' instructional approach, which puts academic learning in a "real world" context, provides some support for this conclusion.

In recent years, the program that has received the greatest attention for its impressive impacts—and its approach to basic skills instruction—is the Center for Employment Training in San Jose, California. CET provides relatively short-duration training (3 to 6 months) to a population of which about 65 percent are high school dropouts. In two rigorous evaluations, one of the JOBSTART sites and another of the Minority Female Single Parent demonstration, researchers found impressive gains in the earnings of CET participants, among the largest ever recorded in a youth training program. CET was the only site with improved earnings: participants had a startling \$6,000 earnings improvement for the third and fourth post-program years combined, more than 40 percent higher than their control counterparts (Cave et al. 1993).

High-quality staff and close connections with the local labor market are often cited as explanations for

the success of CET's flagship program. In addition, observers emphasize CET's integration of basic education with vocational skills training to simulate a real job situation. The JOBSTART demonstration specified that each program provide occupational skills training, instruction in basic academic skills, some training-related support services, and job placement assistance, but each site could decide how to provide these elements. CET was the only site to emphasize the integration of basic education and the training program. Instead of learning academic skills through classroom instruction, students learn them in the context of job training, in an environment meant to approximate some of the dynamic and pressures of a workplace. CET's success reinforces the general intuition of the promise of integrating work and learning.

Work experiences for in-school youth: For in-school youth, evidence is mounting of the positive influence of high-quality workplace experiences on young people's attitudes and performance.¹³ David Stern and his colleagues at the National Center for Research on Vocational Education have examined variations in satisfaction, wages, and employment for students in higher-quality versus lower-quality workplace experiences during high school. Findings include:

- When young people use cognitive skills and perceive opportunities to learn in their work experience, they show evidence of higher commitment to quality on the job and less cynicism about the world of work (Stern et al. 1990).
- Young people who have an opportunity to develop skills on the job and who work at more complex jobs have higher wages and lower unemployment for at least the first three years after high school (Stern and Nakata 1989).

Other studies have found similar patterns. A study of a small group of girls in rural New York State associated higher-quality work experiences while in school with a more successful school-to-work transition (Smith and Gambone 1992). A study of Boston's

¹³ This evidence appears to contradict findings summarized above from the YIEPP demonstration regarding the ineffectiveness of work experience alone. The quality of the work experience may be a factor in explaining this apparent contradiction. So, too, might be the extent to which the programs described here integrated work and school experiences better.

ProTech school-to-career initiative found that students with work placements that demanded more responsibility were more likely to stay in the program (Goldberger 1993).

These findings are particularly encouraging in light of another result of Stern's research. He and his colleagues compared the quality of "naturally occurring" jobs that typically employ teens and work experiences offered in "school-supervised" programs. Youth in school-supervised jobs rated their jobs higher in terms of three important developmental goals: (1) using their skills and abilities; (2) learning new skills; and (3) getting to know adults (Stern et al. 1990). This implies that carefully designed efforts to incorporate employers and work experience into school programs can give young people a boost in the key areas that correlate highly with economic gains from working.

School-to-career initiatives: Research on new programs that integrate school-based and work-based learning is limited, and it is too early to conclude much about employment impacts. But there are positive signs that these programs, which focus on improving the linkages between school and work experiences, motivate and help young people advance academically and toward better careers. Moreover, there is evidence that school-to-career approaches integrating work and school-based learning are particularly promising strategies for schools serving disadvantaged youths in our nation's cities.

Perhaps the best-studied school-to-career programs have been the California Partnership Academies. These forerunners of more recent experimentation with school-to-career program design have grown rapidly in California since one district launched the first academies as a strategy to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school. The academy model includes a school-within-a-school structure, an integrated curriculum built around a broad, single-industry theme (such as media, health, electronics, or graphic arts), and strong support from local businesses, including mentoring and work experience for eleventh and twelfth graders. Also part of the model are added assistance and direction in planning for and applying to college, and strong support

from the district and school administration, including scheduled time for coordination among academy teaching staff.

A study of ten California academies found that the five sites implementing the program most fully "had a strong positive effect on...[their] participants with few examples of negative effects." The dropout rate fell significantly, attendance was somewhat better, and grades were higher than for the comparison group. The Oakland Health Academy, one of the sites that implemented the program most fully, stood out as an exemplar. Its student performance on school-related outcomes was consistently higher than for other academies in the study. The evaluators attribute this success in part to the high level and quality of employer involvement, including the provision of mentors and of school-year and summer jobs relevant to the curriculum (Stern et al. 1989).

An evaluation of New York City's Career Magnet schools has found that many of these programs, to which students are randomly assigned by lottery, are motivating and effective (Crain et al. 1992). Graduates of the career magnets earn more college credits after graduation than do students in the city's traditional high schools. They are more likely to be working in a field related to their high school major, less likely to have high absentee rates, and more likely to say they would choose the same high school program again. The study has also found that the career focus of these schools appears to encourage students to attend college. (Not all the findings were positive: for example, the high standards in career magnet schools appear to have increased dropout rates.)

Jobs for the Future's work with ten school-to-career programs around the country has found some of the same results (Kopp et al. 1995). JFF concluded that in addition to motivating traditionally underserved students to stay in school, these initiatives appear to improve postsecondary enrollment, preparation for and access to jobs, and the self-perceptions and career aspirations of participating young people.

Preliminary research indicates that school-to-career approaches have been particularly effective with

disadvantaged youth. School-to-career programs in California and Philadelphia, specifically designed to serve at-risk students, have demonstrated positive impacts on attendance, grade promotion, and graduation rates (Stern et al. 1992). The three-year dropout rate among students who entered academy programs in California as sophomores was 7.3 percent, compared to 14.6 percent for students in a comparison group (Dayton et al. 1989). Moreover, although these programs were initially created to combat dropout problems, graduates of the California academies were just as likely to attend college as their comparison groups, implying that dropout prevention was not obtained by watering down the high school curriculum. These evaluations "suggest that it is possible to achieve the goals of dropout prevention and college preparation at the same time, in the same program" (Stern et al. 1992).¹⁴

School-to-career initiatives appear to be a particularly promising approach to urban school reform. They provide beleaguered urban school districts a way to capitalize on the many rich, but largely untapped, advantages that cities have over suburbs as settings and opportunities for learning. These include: the sheer size of urban systems, which allows for specialization of high schools by occupational theme; the concentration of employment in cities, which are still the economic centers of most regional economies; and the vibrant cultural and political life in cities, which makes it easy to turn the city itself—its systems of production, distribution, and consumption—into a learning place for young people (Grubb 1995b). Many of these opportunities can be with employers. But in urban communities where the employment base is thin, the city itself is a resource to be tapped—for community-service work, for projects that use the city as a

place to stimulate complex learning, and for entrepreneurial opportunities.

Design Principles for Improved Program Performance

5. A strong, direct connection to, and understanding of, the local labor market and its employers is critical.

Evidence from research and practice emphasizes the importance of both understanding the local labor market and developing solid relationships with the employer community. School-based or community-based work preparation efforts that are weakly attached to the labor market and to employers—and there are many—are limited in their effectiveness.

Secondary vocational education, in which ties between high schools and employers should be great, has had a mixed record of improving students in-school and postsecondary outcomes. The employment and earnings outcomes of vocational students are weaker than those of similar students in college-prep programs. However, there does appear to be a payoff to the minority of vocational students who connect with an employer and stay in work that relates to their field of study. Vocational education participants who found a job in their field of study tended to spend more time in the labor market, suffer less unemployment, and receive higher wages than either vocational participants who did not or a general-track comparison group (Hotchkiss 1987). Those who continued working in related employment after graduation earned 31 percent more than vocationally prepared students who found employment unrelated to their training (Stern et al. 1995).

Evidence from the California academies and CET lead to similar conclusions. Researchers familiar with the success of these efforts—one a three-to

¹⁴ In the late 1980s, Gary Wehlage (1989) and his colleagues at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin argued that dropout prevention strategies had to be built around schoolwide practices that reduce student alienation and spark their interest in learning. Wehlage and Fred Newmann (1995) have highlighted four "circles of support" that together elevate learning for all students. These are: (1) orientation of the core activities of the school toward a vision of high quality student learning; (2) teaching activities and interactions that emphasize thinking, understanding and applications of learning to realistic problems; (3) strengthening of the school as an effective professional community; and (4) support and stimulation from external sources that can set high standards, provide schoolwide staff development, and increase school autonomy. At their best, school-to-career efforts engage all four circles of support.

four-year school program for high school students and the other a three-to-six month training program for out-of school youth (and adults)—emphasize the importance of close connections with the local labor market and effective linkages between employers and the program.

Neither schools nor community-based employment and training providers are particularly well-positioned to connect young people to employers and employment opportunities. In schools, most teachers and administrators know only one industry—the education industry. They tend to be out-of-touch with changes in other industries, while their own industry is labor-intensive, technologically backward, and less involved with team-based problem solving and other aspects of modern work. As a result, their work patterns do not help them learn experientially about emerging trends.

Many community-based employment and training providers are located in areas with a weak employment base. Often, their staff members have worked all their lives in the non-profit, community-based sector or are young and lack experience. In addition, these organizations have few natural ties to the regional labor market. And it is not unusual (or surprising) for staff to be somewhat hostile to a corporate community they may feel has abandoned or exploited their constituency.

For schools and community-based organizations to overcome these barriers, they need staff with experience in the private sector and in industries related to the program's employment targets. CET makes a point of hiring staff who come from industry—for their expertise, their knowledge of local labor-market realities, and their connections with employers who might hire program graduates. Many school-based programs—the academies, co-op efforts, and new school-to-career initiatives—have found it necessary to designate specific staff members to be responsible for relations with employers. Some have found it worthwhile to locate that connecting function outside the school in a third-party intermediary (e.g., a chamber of commerce, private industry council, or business-education partnership) that has credibility with local employers and can understand and respond to labor market trends.

6. Work preparation strategies for young people must take into account their developmental needs and provide activities and services that address those needs.

Even the most world-weary youths—those who have seen friends killed or have raised children since they were 13, those who have had to “grow up” quickly—are still young. They are working their way, at their own speed and with their own advances and retreats, through a natural developmental process of maturing that has physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Youth programs succeed best when they address young people in ways that capture the imagination, impart a sense of pride, and appeal to youth without infantilizing them.

Unfortunately, most youth training programs have tended to evolve as “variations on the types of strategies used in employment programs for adults” (Smith and Gambone 1992:40). They often mirror the emphasis in adult programs on fixing the deficiencies of individuals rather than on encouraging a natural development of attitudes, behaviors, and skills. They make learning dull and tend to focus more on the material to be covered than on the particular aspirations, needs, and challenges facing disadvantaged youth.

If employment and training programs have tended to treat young people as slow adults, schools, in their concern for order and discipline, treat young adults like little children, giving them few opportunities for individual accountability and responsibility. Occasions to be leaders are limited, as are opportunities to engage in decisions about their own educational program.

In the past decade, practitioners and researchers alike have coalesced around an alternative approach that begins from a commitment to youth development. Lessons from the literature on youth and adolescent development form the theoretical underpinning for strategies to help young people join the adult world as productive, engaged workers, citizens, and family members. As Ellen Wahl, former Director of Programs for Girls, Incorporated, has explained:

As youth organization leaders, teachers, curriculum and program designers, we have learned

how essential it is to understand human development. The work we do is to support young people's growing up. If it's not "developmentally appropriate," it won't work or it will be unnecessarily arduous and take much longer. It needs to capture the moment when a person is ready, so that it connects, engages, challenges, and makes joyful the process of learning and discovery.

The "youth development" perspective, though increasingly popular as a way of thinking about improving services to young people, still needs sharper definition. Organizations such as Public/Private Ventures, the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis, and the Center for Youth Development Policy and Research have generated definitions of and frameworks for "youth development" efforts. While there are differences in nuance and emphasis, these definitions share an emphasis on a developmental approach. Effective youth development programs and strategies emphasize:

- Respect for young people as individuals with rich experiences and resources. They do not treat them as clients with deficiencies to be "fixed."
- Provision of places where youth can belong and learn.
- Bringing young people into contact with adults who care about them and hold them to high expectations.
- Giving youth opportunities to participate in setting rules and expectations and in making operational decisions.
- Promoting youth leadership in the program and in the community.

A developmental approach has important implications for designing and implementing youth programming, in schools and for out-of-school youth. In the arena of work preparation, a youth development perspective would lead practitioners and policymakers to focus on work experience, transition points, sequencing of intervention components, and kinds of supports available to young people.

Work experience: Work experience has particular power when incorporated into a youth development strategy. Well-designed and well-structured work experiences, tied to opportunities to learn and

reflect on what is being attempted and accomplished, can be superb vehicles for developing self-confidence and a range of competencies. As Curnan and Melchior argue, "In this context, work experience becomes a tool for youth and employability development and an integral part of the adolescent development process rather than a final outcome."

Transitions: A developmental perspective directs attention to those critical points of transition that are a natural part of growing up and moving through educational and economic institutions. These points include the transition from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to postsecondary work or learning, and initial entry into the workforce, whenever it occurs. Like any major leap in life, each of these transitions requires resourcefulness, confidence, and perseverance. Programs should provide special supports and preparation for young people as they approach and move through these transitions.

Sequencing: From a developmental perspective, program designers might rethink the sequence of program components—basic education, employability training, and work experience. A sequence that makes classroom achievement a prerequisite to work experience tends to lose many young people who might otherwise benefit; the education classes are not motivating enough or delay for too long the gratification that comes from work and income. A better intervention for older youth might place them in jobs early to address the needs for income and connections to the labor market. Basic education and occupational training could fit around and reinforce young people's experiences at work (Ivry 1995).

Support services: Older adolescents tend to need a broader array of, and more intensive, support services than younger teens. They are also more likely to be without the daily support and guidance of families, to have children of their own to take care of, and to face significant financial challenges. For teens of working age, the lack of income in unpaid work experience or training can be a significant barrier to perseverance in a program. Programs that target working age youth must provide a different and broader set of supports than those targeted to younger teens.

7. The importance of strong relationships with caring staff and other adults cannot be underestimated.

Research and practice both point consistently to the importance for young people of building caring, trusting, continuing relationships with adults.

Young people, particularly those who have had few positive role models in their families or communities, need help learning to make, maintain, and use such relationships. In addition, caring adults are the key to motivating and inspiring young people to be open to learning and hard work. These findings have two implications:

1. Programs must incorporate strategies for creating structured—and extended—opportunities for strong relationships with adults.
2. Adults who serve as coaches, mentors, or supervisors, whether in schools, community organizations, or workplaces, need training and staff development opportunities so that these relationships are high quality.

Indirect evidence of the benefits of mentoring relationships comes from a number of sources (U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1995). Adults who are unusually effective report more frequently that they had a mentor. Children who succeed despite deprived childhoods report having benefited from the attention of at least one caring adult. Reviewing more than 100 apparently high-quality programs for at-risk youth, Joy Dryfoos (1990) concluded that individualized attention by one or more adults, in conjunction with community-wide prevention and support services, distinguished these successes.

On the other hand, rigorous evaluations of mentoring programs have found little or no effect on school attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates, or enrollment in postsecondary education (Freedman 1991). This finding has led many to conclude that while mentoring alone might be too modest an intervention, it is probably very important

as part of a more comprehensive effort.¹⁵

Bolstering this belief is evidence from the Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP), a foundation-funded program for high school students that combines mentoring with other services. This youth-development demonstration project, operated by community-based organizations in each site in coordination with high schools, was launched in 1989. QOP followed 25 ninth graders at each site through 4 years of high school and included mentoring by paid, full-time staff; 250 hours each of educational, developmental, and service activities; a club-like atmosphere; a long-term commitment to participants by the program and an adult coordinator; and a financial incentive in the form of a small hourly stipend and deposits into an interest-bearing account for use after high school. Continuity of contact and relationships over time is central to the QOP model, as its motto illustrates: "Once in QOP, always in QOP."

In four out of the five pilot sites that implemented QOP fully, graduation rates rose 50 percent, postsecondary enrollments soared, and behaviors such as childbearing and arrests decreased significantly compared to a control group. While it is impossible to isolate the effects of the personal relationship with program staff, most professionals involved with QOP identified mentoring as pivotal. The continuity of the adult relationship appears particularly important: QOP sites with lower staff turnover tended to have more positive impacts.

Lessons from Implementation

- 8. There is great variation in the impact of program design on different population subgroups. In particular, employment and training impacts tend to be worse for males than for females.**

Evaluation studies typically find different results for male and female participants in the same programs. Education and training programs probably need to be customized to address the different life situations, needs, attitudes, and labor market goals of participating males and females.

¹⁵ A recent control-group study of Big Brother/Big Sister mentoring did find that providing regular and intensive adult friendship and guidance substantially reduced first-time drug use, school absenteeism, and fighting (Tierney and Grossman 1995).

In general, males tend to be less well served by employment and training programs. They are underrepresented in programs compared to women. Fewer program options are available to young men (as opposed to welfare recipients, teen mothers, or other groups of women). And program impacts tend to be worse for young men. Job Corps, which serves only 60,000 individuals a year, is perhaps the one national training program that has demonstrated significant positive impacts for young men while being least effective for single mothers outside the labor force. JTPA research (paralleling studies on the earlier CETA program) found that males in both youth and adult programs tended to have worse labor market outcomes than females. The wage gains, employment gains, GED completion, and other outcomes for young male participants were the same as those of controls who did not participate in the program or, in some cases, worse.

Positive results for males are more difficult to achieve for several reasons. The need for males to earn money, because of their ineligibility for welfare and their desire to be primary breadwinners, makes it more difficult for out-of-school, out-of-work males to enroll in and stay with unpaid or low-stipend training programs. The resistance of employers to hiring and promoting disadvantaged males, particularly minority males, is also a factor in men's lower employment and earnings impacts. In addition, in many urban communities, males may travel in peer groups that disparage being "in a program," partly because it is not "cool" and partly because they know few people who have benefited from program participation.

P/PV's Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project found it very difficult to attract young men who had little connection to education, employment, and training agencies. Local eligibility criteria for JTPA-funded programs, the lack of viable skills training (particularly on-the-job training), and the lack of in-program financial support were serious obstacles to young fathers' enrollment and persistence (Watson 1992). However, programs with jobs to offer participants generally have little trouble finding male applicants.

9. The quality of implementation matters.

Multi-site evaluation studies look at aggregate find-

ings and report the outcomes across a number of sites nationally. Typically, though, variations appear among the sites under study. One of the most important factors in such variation is how operators implement a program model. Did the organization have the staff capacity, management structure, and program experience to put into place key components—and to do that well? Did the program customize the model in ways that proved more effective than the original program design?

Evaluations of QOP, GAIN, and Career Beginnings all found significant variations in outcomes based on how each site implemented the model. The success of the CET site in the JOBSTART Demonstration is another case in point. Evaluators of the California Partnership Academies found better student outcomes at schools that had implemented the academy model most faithfully. An evaluation of the Career Beginnings mentoring program for low-income high school juniors reached a similar conclusion: sites rated "well-implemented" produced better outcomes than those rated "poorly implemented" (Hahn 1992).

In ambitious, innovative interventions, implementation frequently raises new and unanticipated challenges for program planners and practitioners. For example, when P/PV launched the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) in 1984, operators of summer jobs programs involved in the multi-site demonstration lacked experience expanding their programs or linking program components (in this case, jobs plus academic and life-skills curricula) for the same participants two summers in a row. To make consistent implementation more likely, P/PV decided to invest a significant proportion of its resources in extensive local staff training and developing innovative curricular materials (Walker and Vilella-Velez 1992).

Because implementation matters so much, staff development cannot be overemphasized. In schools, reform cannot move forward if teachers do not understand and accept—and own—the pedagogical approach they are being asked to use. This requires opportunities for staff to experiment, sharpen their skills, and reflect on their own and other teachers' practice in a safe environment. The same is true in

community-based youth programs. Yet, resources for staff development are limited and often the first budget item to be cut by states, municipalities, and individual organizations when funding is tight. Moreover, finding the time for staff development presents a serious challenge. Some of the most innovative schools and programs look for ways to build staff development into day-to-day operations to institutionalize them and make them more affordable (Kopp et al. 1995).

Staff development opportunities are all the more needed and critical in the work preparation field. This requires people who know little about job development and labor market dynamics to become more knowledgeable about those fields. It also demands that vocational instructors and youth workers become more effective instructors of academic knowledge. Inadequate attention to these challenges will make it difficult to replicate or adapt effective or promising strategies in new sites.

10. It takes time for results to appear.

Publicly funded programs are always under great pressure to show results. However, the assumption of an immediate, direct correlation between program interventions and measurable outcome gains is frequently simplistic. Positive changes in attitudes and behaviors can lag significantly for young people in particular, in part because issues of trust are critically important to motivation and performance, and also because economic outcomes are constrained by the structure of the youth labor market.

This is a key finding of the Center for Human Resources' evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program (Hahn, Leavitt, and Aaron 1994). The study tracked behavioral and attitudinal outcomes: retention in school, graduation from high school, postsecondary educational attainment, numbers of children, involvement in community service, and hopefulness about the future. More than a year had to elapse before the program began to show any effects, but after that a gap opened between participants and controls, and the gap continued to widen in the post-program years.

Project Redirection, a demonstration project targeted to in-school and out-of-school low-income

teen parents, revealed a similar dynamic. The project connected participants to existing educational and support services in the community and provided mentoring and an after-school program centered around life-skills and parenting. After a two-year study, researchers found no significant impacts. However, another research team, assessing impacts *five years* after enrollment, found more positive results. While half the participants were still receiving AFDC and only one-third were working full-time, the outcomes were better than those for a comparison population in terms of weekly wages, parenting skills, and welfare receipt. The children of participants also showed better cognitive skills and fewer behavioral problems (Polit et al. 1985).

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

In this chapter, we have presented the available evidence on the effectiveness of strategies for improving the labor market success and work preparation of disadvantaged urban youth. The bulk of the available evidence, and therefore of the presentation above, concentrates on what is traditionally thought of as "work preparation"—that is, programs to improve the education, training, and skill development of individuals. As was noted above, research and practice in this program and policy arena is more common and sophisticated than for any of the other challenges identified in Chapter 2. Consequently, consensus on lessons from the education and training world is easier to characterize and proposals for future directions more grounded in experience.

Yet, as this chapter has shown, there is indeed a growing body of knowledge and evidence about "what works." And there is an even larger body of useful evidence on "what doesn't work," across efforts to address the demand and supply sides of the youth labor market. Our reading of this evidence is not nearly as despairing or cynical as the picture that has been painted in the media and political debates about prospects for helping disconnected youth succeed. Rather, we believe that the essential principles and design elements of a more comprehensive and coherent approach to helping young people achieve and advance are relatively obvious and not particularly controversial.

The evidence points both to what works and what could work better. There is currently significant consensus on the building blocks of a more effective system. This system would develop skills in demand in the labor market but would do so in ways that embed supply-side interventions in broader reforms of the economic, social, and service delivery systems within which disadvantaged youth choose their futures.

In our view, the greater challenge is that of vision, will, resources, and implementation. How can innovations that have shown promise or effectiveness in small pilot programs or in localized communities be institutionalized and brought to scale without the sacrifice of consistency and high quality? Here, there is little in either research or practice that

serves as a reliable guide. And how can political and public will and commitment be mobilized to expect and accept a significant period of experimentation and exploration of new approaches and new partnerships, experimentation that will generate failures and dead ends as surely as successes and that will require new resources from public and private sources if it is to be able to be as aggressive and bold as the current moment demands.

The answers to these questions do not yet exist. They must be created through effective practice, continued research, and a vigorous policy and public debate. How to begin to move in this direction—and next steps that the field and the funding community can take toward this end—are the subject of the next and final chapter of this report.

Priorities for the Field—and for Funders

As was emphasized in the last chapter, work preparation programs for urban youth have had largely disappointing results. For most participants, these interventions have done little to advance their educational credentials or earnings, or to change their life prospects. Where bright spots exist, they are small, unique, often sustained with extraordinary funding, and driven by exceptional leaders.

This reality should surprise no one. Most workforce preparation strategies for disadvantaged young people have been doomed from the start, plagued by serious shortcomings. They have tended to be too modest, short-term, and discontinuous. And they have tended to focus on skill deficiencies of individuals in a vacuum, underestimating the importance of the other barriers to success identified in this study—macroeconomic conditions; employer attitudes and behavior; family and community disorganization; and the weakness and fragmentation of local youth-serving organizations.

If our nation's least-advantaged urban youth are to be better served, dramatically new approaches are needed that change both the available employment and earning opportunities, and the ability of young people to take advantage of—and create—opportunities. This agenda will require significant innovations in both practice and policy, to which we now turn.

In the first three chapters of this report, we assessed the nature of the challenge facing urban youth in the education system and the labor market; identified five interrelated barriers that stand between many youth and progress toward economic self-reliance; and summarized lessons from research and practice about promising strategies for addressing those barriers.

In this final chapter, we turn to recommendations for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other funders. We propose a framework for thinking about workforce preparation strategies that can help our nation's most disconnected and at-risk urban youth. We suggest strategies and priorities for the field and for funders that might avoid some of the pitfalls of past practice. In doing so, we pay particular attention to strategies that address some of the challenges facing young urban males of color, for it is this group whose economic and employment prospects have deteriorated most dramatically in recent years. Finally, we suggest priorities for strategic grantmaking that can begin to change not only local practice and public policy, but also the nature of the national discussion about poverty, youth, and the future of our cities.

The framework proposed here begins from the two shortcomings described above:

- **First, supply-side efforts to address young people's skill needs are in and of themselves insufficient.** Skill development efforts must be embedded in and

coordinated with strategies that address the demand side of the labor market—the opportunities for work and careers that are available to individuals from less advantaged communities. In addition, economic approaches to labor market success, emphasizing matches between workers and jobs, must be combined with efforts to address other barriers to effective labor market participation, including the attitudes and behaviors of employers, the nature of family and community supports, and the fragmentation among youth-serving systems and organizations which, together, condition access to economic opportunity.

We cannot afford to focus solely on better ways to “fix” young people’s skill deficiencies. Rather, work preparation strategies for disadvantaged youth must be part of a broader, coordinated approach for improving the “landscape of opportunity” within which young people choose their futures.

- **Second, current supply-side strategies must be broadened beyond narrowly defined skill-building curricula, delivered with traditional classroom methods.** Programs must adopt approaches that build motivation, self-confidence, connections with adults, and opportunities for leadership. In the process, they will be better able to unlock the will to learn and help bring disconnected youth back toward the mainstream—while strengthening academic, technical and social skills that employers increasingly seek.

While definitive evidence on the effectiveness of *specific* programs is limited, the research literature and current practice provide much guidance on better ways to design career-related learning programs for young people. Certain instructional approaches and supports appear to be more effective than others in instilling hope, combating self-doubt and alienation, and motivating learning and accomplishment, both for in-school youth and for those who have dropped out or do not continue with postsecondary studies.

We have no illusions about how difficult it will be to move in the directions laid out in this report—and to approach significant scale for such efforts. Significant changes will be required in the:

- Nature of our national commitment to cities and their residents;
- Relationship between the publicly funded employment and education systems and private employers;
- Composition and responsibilities of community partnerships around employment, economic development, learning programs, and individual, family, and community supports;
- Alignment between the programs, standards, and credentials of the education and training systems; and
- Pedagogy, curriculum, and staff development efforts in schools and other youth-serving programs.

Difficult and contentious issues of funding, governance, design and implementation must be addressed. And decision-making forums at the community level will have to be enlarged to include not just education and training providers, but also the two other constituencies that meet in the youth labor market—employers and community residents.

The barriers facing efforts to help young people succeed are the products of powerful and deeply rooted forces in our society and polity. Political discourse during the past two decades has eroded what little public consensus existed on the role of government in addressing social and economic inequities. Sensitivities around issues of race, as well as racism itself, have contributed to the weakening of political will to help our nation’s needy youth. Policy and practice are hampered by the fragmentation of federal agencies and funding streams, which has created obstacles to effective collaboration among youth-serving institutions. Professionals in the helping fields contribute to these problems by making increasingly fine distinctions among and within disciplines which reinforce the tendency to address young people’s needs singly and sequentially.

Improving work preparation for disadvantaged urban youth requires tackling the most intractable problems of poverty and the lack of economic opportunity. And it means doing so at a time when political will and imagination for addressing joblessness

and poverty are at a low ebb, when the economic forces buffeting our cities appear unstoppable, and when many who have worked for years to help young people are struck more by the marginal impacts of their efforts than by their successes. In this context, it seems almost unfair to emphasize the shortcomings of current efforts and naive to suggest that more complex, comprehensive, and concerted strategies are needed.

Yet, the alternative is increasingly unacceptable. In our cities' most depressed neighborhoods, where more people are jobless on any given day than are employed, the belief that stable families and vital community institutions will routinely help young people make their way into the adult world lies shattered. To combat despair and disintegration, new two-pronged approaches are needed that are:

- designed to improve the skills and attitudes of young people through programs that build confidence and competencies valued in the labor market; and
- committed to linking those efforts to economic strategies that can increase employment and earnings.

To advance this agenda will take time—and work. It will take a concerted long-term campaign that creatively combines public engagement, policy development, research, and local practice. And it will require immodest proposals about how to reverse the economic decline of our cities, strengthen the social fabric of distressed urban communities, and improve the education and work preparation options available to urban youth. These proposals will have to challenge prevailing assumptions about markets, governmental action, responsibilities of public and private sectors, and the boundaries of political jurisdictions. Ultimately, advancing this agenda will require political organizing and the construction of political will.

As improbable as this agenda may seem in the current political climate, there are small signs of new openness to a public conversation about the employment and earnings of inner city residents. When they are being honest, conservatives and liberals alike acknowledge that disparities between our cities and the rest of the nation are beginning to

carry a heavy price tag. The crisis of our poorest urban neighborhoods was a central topic in the 1996 Vice Presidential debate. Cities—and their unemployed and disconnected residents—are beginning to find their way back onto the political agenda.

However, this conversation will occur neither naturally nor automatically. And, in all likelihood, it will be a heated and bitter. Moreover, a revived debate about our cities' futures does not guarantee a research-based consensus on what constitutes effective policy and practice. *During this period when both policy and practice are in flux, philanthropic organizations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation can play a critically important public leadership role.*

The remainder of this report charts the territory that must be traversed if our nation is to address the challenge of helping *all* its young people gain access to and succeed in the labor market and function in the mainstream rather than on the margins of social and economic life. We address four issues:

1. **Strategies that address the economic and social "landscape of opportunity" within which young people choose their futures;**
2. **Strategies to improve skill-related, supply-side interventions so that they spark greater confidence, competence, and connections; and**
3. **Implications of these priorities for the composition and roles of community partnerships; and**
4. **Recommendations to the Casey Foundation and other funders about next steps to further this ambitious agenda in communities, states, and at the national level.**

We propose a combination of activities that: build public awareness and will, promote debate and consensus on policy alternatives, generate research on effective approaches, and strengthen the quality of local practice.

Strategies that Address the Economic and Social Landscape of Opportunity

As emphasized above, the deterioration of labor market outcomes for urban youth, particularly dropouts and high school completers, is the most important fact of life in our poorest cities and neighborhoods. The declining demand for less-skilled and less-experienced workers—even those who are willing to work at

low wages—requires two aggressive responses: (1) urban economic development strategies to increase the availability of quality employment, including redefinition of the relationship between cities and their regional economies; and (2) strategies to change employer attitudes and behaviors regarding recruitment, hiring, and workforce development.

Supply-side training efforts should be linked to these strategies, so that populations in need are prepared for, and have access to, opportunities being created, either naturally in the regional economy or through targeted urban and regional economic development efforts. As has happened in some cities, providers of employment and training might also become effective employment brokers serving the needs of employers and low-skill workers alike. Finally, organizations that work closely with inner-city youth can help alter employer attitudes and human resource practices.

Job Creation, Access, and Quality

As William Julius Wilson (1996) writes, the best strategy for addressing the negative effects of joblessness would be to create jobs. Wilson advocates a WPA-style public jobs program, available to anyone over eighteen and offering useful employment at slightly below minimum wage. Lynn Curtis (1995), President of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, has advanced a similar proposal: put low-skill, unemployed, inner-city residents to work improving their neighborhoods and city—rehabilitating housing, repairing the urban infrastructure teaching in inner city schools, meeting the child care needs of working adults. However, as both Wilson and Curtis are quick to acknowledge, these proposals and their price tags of \$15 billion or more a year are outside the boundaries of political discourse today, with its emphasis on smaller government and individual responsibility.

Still, in the absence of a major public employment program, there are examples of more modest demand-side strategies that have shown promise.

The Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative, for example, is promoting exploration of a range of strategies to: create new jobs; increase the access of hard-to-employ local residents to jobs in the neighborhood, downtown, and in the suburbs; and improve existing jobs so that individuals can advance more quickly to better-paid opportunities.¹⁶ Specific strategies include:

- **A targeted approach to job development, particularly in industry sectors that are growing in the regional economy and that generate relatively well-paying entry-level jobs;**
- **Transportation strategies that connect inner city residents with jobs in the suburban areas;**
- **Aggressive local hiring agreements with employers, particularly on government-funded development projects;**
- **Employment brokering services that reduce the costs of recruitment, screening, and hiring for employers while providing targeted workers with the guidance and support they need to get and hold a job;**
- **Leveraging the employment opportunities (often in health and social service agencies) that remain in low-income neighborhoods; and**
- **Enriching existing jobs so they can serve as stepping stones to higher skill employment in the same or another firm.**

Other strategies are being tested nationally. Grass-roots activist groups have launched local and state-level "living wage" campaigns designed to raise significantly the minimum wage on government-funded contracts. Some organizations have focused on job creation in rehabilitating and managing public housing. The new welfare legislation with its work requirements and time limits has prompted the advocacy community to explore ways to enrich both low-wage jobs and the community service placements that will now be required of many recipients.¹⁷

¹⁶ For more detail on the Casey Foundation's Job Initiative, contact the Foundation at 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202.

¹⁷ See Taylor, Judith Combes. 1997. *Learning at Work in a Work-Based Welfare System: Opportunities and Obstacles*. Boston: Jobs for the Future.

Employer Attitudes and Behaviors

Traditionally, work preparation strategies for disadvantaged youth have had relatively weak relationships with employers, their supposed "customer." Yet, significant commitment from employers is critical if public-sector education and training systems are to prepare inner city youth effectively for entering an increasingly demanding and competitive labor market. Employers in the private, public, and non-profit sectors can provide young people with jobs and income, labor market connections, and opportunities to learn and to feel a sense of accomplishment and mastery. They can also provide an economic reality check which schools and community-based organizations often cannot. At the same time, for employers to become deeply involved in a community's efforts, they must feel that their needs are being met, their priorities taken seriously, and their time constraints respected. And they must feel that the costs they are asked to bear are reasonable.

Employer resistance to hiring and working with young people—and minority urban youth in particular—is widespread. Altruism alone will be insufficient motivation for employers to invest in urban youth over the long-run. However, experience indicates that employers often alter their calculations of the risks and benefits of working with disadvantaged youth as they become more familiar with the population and better able to identify those with the potential to excel, and as they see benefits to their existing workforce from having young people in their workplaces.

Despite much rhetoric, relatively little attention has been paid to strategies to engage greater numbers of employers in more meaningful work-related relationships with urban youth, both in-school and out-of-school. From our research, we identified three promising approaches:

- Lessen the costs and risks for participating employers;
- Target receptive employer groups; and
- Change employer perceptions and biases about young people, particularly minority males.

Lessen the costs and risks for employers: Third-party intermediaries, such as a Private Industry Council, chamber of commerce, or independent

local partnership, can lower the "hassle factor" and the coordination costs for individual employers, making it easier for them to become and stay involved in programs targeted to disadvantaged urban youth. The most effective intermediaries possess credibility with business and industry, a history of working with employers, and an understanding of the culture of the local employer community.

Another way to reduce employers' costs of recruiting, hiring, and training less-skilled urban youth is for community-based, non-profit agencies to increase their capacity to function as employment brokers. Employment and training agencies with a track record of identifying good workers with job-ready skills who meet the needs of employers and stay on the job can capitalize on employer frustration with the high costs of staff recruitment and staff turnover. Success requires community-based providers to understand local labor market trends, provide high quality training, be familiar with assessment technologies that can improve job matches, and provide on-going post-placement support. Agencies may be able to build their capacity and expertise with the help of technical assistance and staff development from specialized private sector firms, including temporary help/staffing firms.

Target receptive employer groups: Certain employer groups are more likely to be receptive to employing and working with urban youth. These include: minority-owned and minority-run firms; youth employers; and employers in industrial sectors of the regional economy that are feeling a labor shortage in entry-level and other sub-baccalaureate jobs.

When the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies organized a study tour a few years ago to look at European workforce preparation systems, tour participants included in their final report recommendations for a campaign to engage minority employers in providing work-based learning opportunities and career mentoring for urban youth, particularly those of color. While this idea has not been acted upon in a concerted way, the appeal of this proposal is obvious: in urban areas, outside downtown, most employers are small and a significant proportion are minority-owned or minority-managed.

They could become leaders in a visible national campaign for youth.

A second target group is employers who already rely on teenage workers. In some urban neighborhoods, the only employers who do significant hiring are youth employers, such as fast food restaurants. Nationally, these employers hire millions of youth annually. As P/PV's *Work Plus* demonstration learned, motivating these employers to participate in on-the-job enrichment activities is difficult. The pace of work is quick; supervisors are often little older or more experienced than their front-line staff; and even finding the physical space for meetings and training can be a challenge. However, efforts to engage the youth-employing business community in strategies to enrich and credential the learning content of youth jobs should be revisited and supported.

Finally, employers in industries that are growing rapidly in the regional economy and that tend to hire relatively low-skill workers should also be targeted. Sectoral approaches, which identify critical industries and understand their employment and growth dynamics, can help communities link supply-side and demand-side strategies more effectively.

Change employer perceptions and biases about young people, particularly minority males: As former Labor Secretary Ray Marshall puts it, American employers tend to "hire against youth," preferring older, more settled workers. As noted in Chapter 2, there is evidence of significant discrimination by employers against youth, particularly against young minority males. To change this dynamic will require specific strategies to alter employer perceptions and attitudes. Possible approaches include:

- Creation of local diversity management extension services that could help small- and medium-sized business owners and managers develop skills in the management of diversity by providing training and consulting, documentation of best practices, and new training materials.
- Increased discussion of mutual expectations (and stereotypes) among employers and minority males through face-to-face roundtables organized by local intermediaries and other mutually agreeable public forums.

- Post-placement follow-up services that help new workers adjust to workplace realities. Traditionally underfunded by federal employment and training dollars, post-placement follow-up support provided by third parties appears to help change employers' risk/benefit calculations by reducing their fears and improving employee performance.
- Publicly disseminated studies of hiring practices that raise community awareness, spur employer reflection, and lessen bias in recruitment and hiring.

Strategies to Improve the Design and Delivery of Skill-Related Interventions

The changing realities of urban labor markets require creative responses on *both* the demand and supply sides. As jobs disappear from urban areas, many inner-city youth are not prepared to secure and stay with even the entry-level jobs that are available. Research on both welfare populations and urban minority males have concluded that the effects of multi-generational joblessness and poverty, poor schooling, and limited appreciation of changing employer expectations leaves many youth and young adults without the skills or attitudes to succeed on the job (Maynard 1995; Taylor 1996; Anderson 1990a).

Given the weakened demand for low-skill labor across the economy and in cities in particular, supply side strategies to improve the skills of urban youth are critically important. There is growing evidence of the value of both hard skills, such as math and computer literacy (Holzer 1996), and soft skills such as communications, teamwork, and interaction with customers and co-workers (Tilly 1995; Murnane and Levy 1996).

In this context, supply-side interventions must become more rigorous to match changing employer demand. They must address not simply technical training for specific jobs, but also basic academic preparation in literacy, numeracy and computers and, importantly, socialization and motivation. In inner cities where alienation, competing demands, and resistance to "being in a program" are powerful, education and training providers need to focus first and foremost on approaches that can build hope, trust, and a belief that success is possible. They

must give young people the confidence and the tools to navigate their way in a changing labor market. To do this, programs must combine respect for participants' strengths and high expectations for their performance, coupled with realistic prospects for employment.

Our research found encouraging evidence of convergence toward a common set of design principles within the youth-serving field—in schools serving at-risk populations and second-chance programs targeted to out-of-school and out-of-work youth. As we illustrate below, there is a small, but vital body of practice that reflects the powerful lessons summarized in Chapter 3.

At the same time, many challenges remain if the urban population's most at-risk are to be adequately served by supply-side education and work preparation efforts. Two of these deserve special attention. One is the need for more effective linkages between the second-chance and mainstream education systems, so that the basic literacy, skill training, and work readiness instruction of the second-chance system does not become a dead-end revolving door that limits participants' opportunities for advancement. The second is the need to develop strategies, initiatives, and supports targeted to young men of color, the population faring worst in the urban labor market. Without these two programmatic and policy foci, the life chances of too many of our nation's urban youth are likely to be unaffected by new work preparation strategies.

Toward Common Design Principles

Work preparation policy in this country has historically drawn a sharp distinction between efforts to assist in-school and out-of-school youth (i.e., those who are still in the educational system and those who have left it). For many reasons, including different funding streams, institutional bases, and professional credentialing systems, most programs for out-of-school youth have been part of a second-class training system, disconnected from the educational system and its more valuable credentials.

However, as the research summarized in Chapter 3 indicates, approaches that improve the skills, attitudes, confidence, and work-readiness of school dropouts parallel what "works" for at-risk, in-

school youth. There are signs of convergence toward some important design principles across parts of the education and training systems.

One indication of such convergence is PEPNet, a new national effort to recognize and help publicize "promising and effective practices" in youth work preparation programs. A project of the National Youth Employment Coalition, PEPNet is a growing network of youth initiatives that meet high standards of effectiveness in the areas of quality management, youth development, workforce development, and evidence of success—as defined by a working group of practitioners, researchers, advocates, policymakers, and employers.

The first group of recognized initiatives, announced in fall of 1996, included programs for both in- and out-of-school youth: summer youth employment, Job Corps, urban youth corps, alternative high school, GED, and school-to-career programs. These programs met PEPNet's quality standards and also tended to share other characteristics, including: a focus on older youth (16-25 years old); youth "voice" and involvement in governance; an extended services approach, including post-placement support; innovative work experience components, emphasizing work-based learning; continuous improvement; community service; and links to the private sector (National Youth Employment Coalition 1996).

In JFF's field research for this study, we visited many innovative work preparation programs serving disadvantaged youth, both in- and out-of school, that are guided by a common set of design principles similar to those embodied in PEPNet. (See Appendix B for a list of site visits.) These principles include:

Centrality of work-based learning: A growing number of programs for out-of-school youth, such as YouthBuild and youth corps programs, have made work experience central to program design. So, of course, have school-to-work efforts around the country, such as Boston's ProTech programs, California's Partnership Academies, and Wisconsin and Maine's youth apprenticeship initiatives. Depending upon local economic conditions and program design, a variety of more and less intensive work experience strategies are employed, including: job shadowing, community service,

structured work experience, longer-term apprenticeship experiences, and school-based enterprises.

Active and experiential pedagogy: Out-of-school youth who return to learning programs are typically disillusioned about traditional education and doubt their ability to learn. Efforts to overcome resistance to classroom instruction often emphasize: experiential, multi-disciplinary instructional approaches; competency-based instruction; integration of basic education and technical instruction; and concurrent, rather than sequential, provision of education and employment components. For many of the same reasons, school-to-career programs for in-school youth also emphasize an active, experiential pedagogy. In its study of 16 school-to-work programs nationally, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (Pauly et al. 1994) found that:

- Most use a variety of experiential instructional techniques, such as project-based assignments, hands-on tasks, team activities, assignments that emphasize problem-solving and communication skills, and new kinds of assessment;
- Teachers felt these changes were necessary to engage students who typically have not succeeded in school; and,
- Students reported being more interested and involved than in coursework assigned in other classes.

Emphasis on youth development: Programs that are successful in reaching alienated youth who may

have failed in the past show respect for young people, give them responsibility and leadership roles, and help build self-confidence through positive adult relationships. Milbrey McLaughlin of Stanford University emphasizes the "ABCs" of successful youth programs: Agency, Belonging, and Competence. These same core youth development elements can be found in both the best high schools and the best work preparation programs for out of school youth.¹⁸

Strong relationships with adults and peers: When young people explain why they like a program, their answers invariably focus on relationships with committed, caring staff and with fellow participants. In programs that involve work placements, youth tend to rate the mentoring relationship as the most positive program component.¹⁹ Young people also point to a sense of "family" as a powerful factor in their decision to stick with or leave a program (P/PV 1989). At Manhattan Valley and STRIVE in New York, we were told how important it was for staff to be available to participants 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In both school and community programs, we also saw an emphasis on building cohesion among small groups of young people and adults, through work crews in youth corps programs, smaller learning communities in alternative schools and school-to-career programs, case management structures, team-based assignments, and events and paraphernalia that reinforce group identity.

¹⁸ At a 1995 meeting convened by Jobs for the Future and the Academy of Educational Development, participants from programs working with in- and out-of-school youth populations identified four basic areas of congruence between school-to-career principles and those of informal youth community-based youth programs (Jobs for the Future 1995):

- **Asset-based mission and goals:** Both school-to-career and youth development perspectives emphasize preparing young people for adulthood, not simply deterring them from engaging in problem behaviors.
- **Active learning strategies:** Both share the belief that young people develop best by learning in context, being active participants and leaders in their learning, and being challenged and supported to excel.
- **Strong relationships with adults:** At the core of both movements is a conviction that young people need and deserve opportunities to interact with and earn the respect of adults.
- **Vital local partnerships:** School-to-career and youth development movements stress the need to create broad local partnerships and networks involving a full spectrum of community interests and members.

¹⁹ In Jobs for the Future's study of ten school-to-career programs, over 75 percent of the students surveyed indicated that the programs allowed them to form special relationships with adults, particularly with worksite mentors (Kopp et al. 1995).

Support that is consistent and effective over time:

Disadvantaged youth spend a lot of time looking for reliable child care, negotiating the social services bureaucracy to obtain housing and public assistance, securing part-time employment, and accessing health care, mental health services, and assistance with the criminal justice system. These challenges do not disappear upon completion of a training program or placement in a job. Some training programs, such as Cleveland Works, have incorporated legal services into their efforts, because so many of its clients have legal problems that make them less employable. The Vocational Foundation in New York and many others provide health services and advice on how to obtain other assistance. STRIVE has created a short "boot camp" to get participants ready for employment; but counselors then stay in touch with participants for two years. Career academies and other school-to-work programs have found that their intensive, multi-year design provides students with a stable network of adults they can trust and with whom they are willing to take risks.

Standards for accomplishment that are rigorous and respected by both postsecondary institutions and employers: Perhaps the most important element of this growing consensus is the commitment to high standards of accomplishment that can meet the expectations of two institutions critical to lifelong learning and career advancement—employers and higher education institutions. Promising school-to-career programs appear to be able to encourage previously low-performing students to meet postsecondary admissions standards.²⁰ An increasing number of work preparation efforts for out-of-school youth are combining an alternative high school diploma with occupational training, so they can tap local education dollars and grant diplomas recognized by the mainstream education system. Several YouthBuild programs have moved in this direction, as has the Community-Based Learning Project in Los Angeles.

Programs for both in- and out-of-school youth also understand that their graduates must meet prevailing

labor market standards and expectations. If a GED—or high school diploma—does not ensure mastery of the New Basic Skills employers demand (see Chapter 2), the labor market value of that certificate will remain limited. For this reason, school-to-career programs often involve employers in curriculum development and standard-setting. Innovative second-chance efforts are trying to raise academic standards as well. The Diploma Plus program being piloted in four Boston alternative high schools is designed to tackle head-on the obstacles of limited resources, inadequate staff development, and acute skill deficiencies among participants that often stymie second-chance programs as they try to raise achievement standards.

The Need for Systemic Reform

The growing consensus on the key design principles that should guide work-related learning programs, for both in- and out-of-school youth, is a promising development. Yet, reform efforts will have to move beyond a shared vision among a growing subgroup of practitioners to systemic reforms that create and strengthen the weak or non-existent links between the second chance and the mainstream educational systems.

Fortunately, the beginnings of a framework for systemic reform and better integration of education and training systems has been put in place at the federal level. Underfunded, incomplete, and weak in some of its basic design, the federal School To Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 does provide a foundation from which to build a vision of an integrated system, serving all youth and preparing them for either high wage employment or further education. At least in its rhetoric and intent, the Act addresses some of the problems that have plagued federal policy around skill development for decades and champions the design principles outlined in the previous few pages.

Building upon innovative practice in the field, the School To Work Opportunities Act reflects an attempt to begin to build a more coherent system

²⁰ In three programs studied by Jobs for the Future, between 77 and 84 percent of participating students (who had been selected for the program because they were "non-college-bound") enrolled in either two- or four-year college, full-time or part-time in combination with work (Kopp et al. 1995).

for preparing young people for work. It emphasizes and supports: high academic standards, work experience, the combination of work and classroom-based learning, the importance of adult relationships, the power of experiential learning, vertical linkages between different educational opportunities, and long-term involvement and supports that help young people advance into further education or career opportunities. The Act is built around "three integrations":

- Academic and vocational learning;
- School- and work-based learning; and
- Secondary and postsecondary institutions.

Yet, while the STWOA provides a powerful vision and a more comprehensive strategy for linking the supply and demand sides of the labor market through practical learning, high standards, and closer relations with employers, it has fallen short of its vision, both in its legislative provisions and in practice. The Act is virtually silent on strategies for reaching out-of-school youth and the resources authorized for states and localities were insufficient to meet the goal of reaching "all youth." Moreover, because of the complex changes required by the Act's design elements, implementation has been uneven—and the services and supports needed to ensure success for the most at-risk students have often been underdeveloped or absent.

Norton Grubb (1996) of the University of California at Berkeley has argued that if the School To Work Opportunities Act could be extended and expanded, in two directions, it could serve as the basis of a new push for systemic reforms. His proposal has two components:

1. Use the principles of the Act as a framework for knitting the vocational education and job training systems into one coherent, vertically-linked learning system; and
2. Extend and improve the support systems that can help the most disadvantaged participants in training programs address the multiple non-academic barriers that keep them from sustained employment.

Vertical ladders: The only way that less-skilled individuals will be able to advance sequentially into

higher-skill and higher-paid positions is if the job training and education systems are reintegrated, so that short-term training is a step on a vertical ladder, not a dead-end.

If the approach codified in the Act is to be relevant to the hard-to-employ out-of-school youth population, it must be extended beyond the education system and its longer-term credentialing programs to include the training system and its short-term, often remedial programs. Shorter-term training programs for those with little or no occupational skills may well remain; but they should be linked in a recognized and effective way to either immediate employment or additional training and education. Ultimately, those who continue to advance would find their way to certificate and degree programs in postsecondary educational institutions that have real value in the labor market. At any rung along the way, work-based learning and more effective relationships with local employers would make it easier for participants to find employment.

This reintegrated system would not require individual programs to converge in their length, level of academic rigor, content, or target population. It would, however, require programs to specify where they lead, that is, to identify next rungs on the ladder. And it would require collaborative agreements among a diverse set of institutions (including community-based organizations, vocational schools, community colleges, unions, and firms) specifying expectations about the content and quality of programs feeding into higher rungs.

Development of a coordinated system with clearly defined ladders would be most beneficial for those with the least skills and those most in need of flexible approaches to link work and formal instruction. For out-of-school individuals who have been relegated to the least-intensive, short-term, federally funded training programs, from which they have seen only small, short-lived benefits, a system of vertical ladders holds out the possibility of advancement into educational programs with better labor market outcomes. Programs designed on this model would enable participants to achieve small, incremental accomplishments and steps along a path to better opportunity, through alternating and

different combinations of work, skill development, and credentialing.

Support services: More coherent ladders or pathways connecting the training and education systems are only one element of what most disadvantaged job seekers need in skill-development programs. They also need better guidance and support services that can help them deal with barriers to employment that are neither academic nor related to job skills. These barriers may include trouble with the law, substance abuse, mental illness, limited English proficiency, inadequate child care options, physical disabilities and health problems, and chaotic, violent families and neighborhoods. Effective programs for the most disadvantaged must include support services that help individuals cope with challenges that conventional offerings of education and job training—classroom instruction, work-based learning, job search assistance, and help with job placement—cannot overcome (Grubb 1966).

There is growing evidence that support services do make a difference in helping the most at-risk program participants succeed. Ohio's LEAP program for teenagers on welfare provides some evidence that enhancing programs with more intensive counseling and support services can lead to improved educational outcomes (Long et al. 1994). Certain mentoring and case-management approaches have had positive effects on program participants.

In general, remedial education, guidance and counseling, and other typical support services provided in education and training programs are not highly valued. Dropout rates from remedial programs are high; many students see no advantage to tapping school counseling services. Grubb argues that a key problem might be the way services are typically provided. Remedial education classes are usually free-standing. Instruction is didactic. Guidance, too, is typically delivered outside the context of the core activities of the program, by counselors who may have little knowledge of the program and be poorly trained to deliver career-oriented counseling. He concludes that programs of a unified education and training system should treat support services in the same integrated and developmental way that this report advocates for imparting occupational and

academic competencies. Integrating supports with other program elements—such as academic instruction, career exploration, and work-based learning—may make them more appealing and effective for those who can benefit from them the most.

Targeting Efforts to Young Males of Color

The evidence in this study is unequivocal: young urban males of color confront a particularly complex set of obstacles to their development and advancement in school, work, and family life and they are falling behind in the economic race to succeed. Any strategies to improve the economic and social well-being of urban children and families must pay special attention to the challenges faced by this group.

Many traditional youth service systems—national youth agencies, religious youth groups, sports organizations, and municipal parks and recreation departments—address the developmental needs of young black men (ages 10-15). Much of the participation is on a fee-for-service basis, most is only in the range of one to two hours a week, and poorer youth are less well-served (Quinn 1994).

Poorer black males in high-risk environments appear to be best served by community-based organizations *not* affiliated with national youth organizations, according to Harvard University's Ronald Ferguson. Ferguson (1994) studied more than twenty organizations identified by community activists in six cities as "best practice" programs making a difference in young males' lives. They were all small, independent organizations, with the typical constraints and limitations of such groups: heavy reliance on categorical federal funding; inadequate staff and poor staff development; little or no evaluation or program improvement strategies (Mincy 1994).

Few training programs funded through traditional federal JTPA sources are customized to address the special needs of working age minority males, either in- or out-of school. Andrew Hahn (1994) has estimated that only 7 percent of black males between 15 and 21 received services from JTPA in 1990 in non-summer programs and Job Corps.

Jobs for the Future staff visited or collected information on a number of explicitly work-related programs

targeted to minority males over 16, including: job clubs that assist with job searches; young fathers' programs that combine parenting and responsibility curricula with opportunities for training and work preparation; and programs that enhance existing work preparation programs with workshops for men on communication, leadership, conflict resolution, social skills, ethnic pride, and multicultural understanding. While encouraging, these efforts are small, and they are few and far between.

Program staff interviewed for a recent Urban Institute study of 51 community-based programs serving African-American males identified the following components as critical to preparing young black males for the future (Majors and Wiener 1995):

- Entrepreneurship skills;
- Financial management;
- Computer literacy;
- Interpersonal skills and "negotiating the system"; and
- Teen father sessions focused on sexual attitudes, self-esteem, peer pressure, male responsibility, and leadership.

Staff from programs visited for this study consistently emphasized two obstacles to their ability to serve minority males effectively. One is the shortage of resources. Federal training resources for disadvantaged males are far more limited than for welfare-eligible young women. Moreover, the resources that local providers can secure to serve men are cobbled together in inefficient and frustrating arrangements that make consistent, long-term service nearly impossible.²¹

The other challenge is engaging young men sufficiently to attract them to and keep them attending work preparation programs. Our interviews identified

several ways to make participation more attractive and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes, including:

Combine earning and learning: Many young men have children they help support or other pressing financial obligations. Education and training programs compete not only with low wage jobs but also with the more lucrative drug trade (Perez and Cruz 1994). More men would enroll and stay in programs if they could earn while they learn in programs that find job placements immediately and then either introduce on-the-job training, combine off-site training with part-time employment, or offer living-wage stipends during training.

Provide role models from the community: Positive role models can help attract young men of color to, and keep them in, effective programs long enough to develop self-confidence, skills, and connections. For this reason, John Bess, director of Manhattan Valley, tries to recruit a significantly male, all-minority staff and to create a climate in which staff act as father or brother role models. Other ways to bring role models into young male's lives is to match youth with minority-owned businesses or with working minority males for work-based learning opportunities and mentoring.

Prepare young males of color to deal with workplace culture: Inner-city young men of color have an especially great need for orientation to the culture of the workplace, given their limited exposure to the world of work, strong stereotypes that employers have of their behaviors and attitudes, and peer pressures to reject opportunities to "make it in the white world." A debilitating combination of self-doubt, anger, fear, and ambivalence about employment can make it hard for these young men to engage in seri-

²¹ Consider Cleveland Works, which receives 600 applications a year for its 300-slot Beat the Streets program, primarily serving 16- to 25-year-old African-American males. JTPA youth funding supports services only to 16- to 21-year-olds. Some resources for 22- to 25-year-old men are secured through the courts and a pre-trial diversion program. For services to males over 25, the options are even more limited. Most available funding comes from county and state JOBS training dollars which target (predominantly female) AFDC recipients. State training dollars earmarked for general assistance (GA) recipients is no longer available, since it is being phased out in Ohio. Local JTPA administrators recently decided that the same organization cannot receive funding to serve both youth and adults. Cleveland Works has turned to HUD funding for public housing residents and to private foundations for resources that can be targeted to males over 21.

ous job search, perform well in interviews, and deal with workplace conflicts—unless they have opportunities and support for overcoming those emotions and developing those skills.

Provide access to support networks beyond those traditionally available in work preparation programs: By the time many disadvantaged youth of color become older adolescents, they lack support systems strong enough to help them overcome daily challenges. A large percentage of minority men are entangled in the criminal justice system; many are essentially homeless, moving from place to place on a temporary basis; a significant percentage need professional help to address serious emotional (and sometimes physical) problems. Funding to extend the length of program services would increase the likelihood of success with this difficult subgroup. In every program we visited, programs as diverse as Philadelphia's in-school QOP program and Cleveland's Institute for Responsible Fatherhood for out-of-school youth, staff noted the need to work with participating young men beyond daily program time and allotted program tenure.

Implications for Community Partnerships and Local Governance

To move in the directions advocated in this study will require new approaches to planning and governance of local anti-poverty efforts. The supply side proposals require new partnerships between employers, educational institutions and training providers. Grassroots local institutions outside the mainstream (churches, community organizations, informal youth groups) must be involved, since they are frequently able to reach more disaffected and marginalized community residents. Better coordination with other service providers who can assist with legal, health, day care, and other needs must also be part of any supply-side strategy. Demand-side efforts to address the "landscape of opportunity" within which youth make decisions will require additional interests to be represented and engaged—economic development agencies, banks and other sources of capital, public housing authorities, the range of employers in the local and regional labor markets, and governments at all levels.

How can these community-level efforts be organized so that they are both representative and efficient? This is largely uncharted territory. There is limited experience around the country with bringing these worlds together effectively. When the interests are as diverse as local employers, grassroots community groups, postsecondary educational institutions, public schools, and local governmental officials, the risks are high. Bringing "too many" interests to the table runs the risk that the entire effort will fall of its own weight. Yet, inviting too few can compromise legitimacy.

In school-to-career and other work-focused initiatives, third-party intermediaries trusted by employers often play an important role in aggregating employer interests and reducing their costs. But should that intermediary work with employers to identify and support welfare-to-work placements under the 1996 federal legislation? Or is a different intermediary needed? Similarly, an intermediary trusted by employers may help bring and keep them at the table, but will it be able to work effectively with community-based organizations that are often anti-corporate in their bias? Different strategies require different partnerships. For example, sectoral strategies for economic development that emphasize industry clusters and new relationships between cities and their suburbs imply jurisdictional boundary-crossing that do not fit easily with neighborhood-level governance models.

Ultimately, there is no single answer to these conundrums. Complicated questions of local planning, resource allocation, participation, coordination, and "who is in charge of what" demand integrative and community-wide governance structures (Sviridoff 1996). Fragmentation of youth services and poor linkages between supply-side and demand-side anti-poverty strategies cannot be addressed without more, and more effective, local collaboration.

However, it is ill-conceived to try to identify a single, preferred governance mechanism. Local communities are too diverse—in their politics, the strength of different organizations and institutions, and the priorities of local leaders and residents. Rather, it is better to identify functions such structures need to perform, and the interests that need be engaged,

and then let local circumstances dictate the governance structure.

This is an area where much experimentation is needed and where careful analysis of the lessons from different approaches would be beneficial. The Casey Foundation's New Futures initiative was instructive, largely because the Foundation made a commitment to mining the effort for its lessons on these issues. The Foundation's Jobs Initiative is likely to yield further knowledge, as are other comprehensive community-building initiatives being supported by the Annie E. Casey and other national foundations.

Whatever the ultimate governance structure (or structures), community efforts to improve work preparation for young people in the ways suggested above will have to address the following collaborative challenges:

- Identifying the key constituencies that must work together and efficient, inclusive approaches to bringing them to the table;
- Bringing "left out" institutions and groups into the system. A comprehensive approach to work preparation must engage groups that are often left out or choose to stay out of community planning efforts. Four-year colleges and universities are usually conspicuously absent, even though their standards are critically important. Other systems that deal with youth, including the criminal justice system, must be involved. So, too must informal grassroots organizations that provide social cohesion and social control in disadvantaged communities, including churches, sports leagues, youth clubs, and other functioning networks.
- Developing a common vision for work preparation priorities for the community, including issues of definition, scale and scope, and principles for collaboration among youth-serving institutions;
- Specifying and coordinating a continuum of services that are available to individuals as they need them, over the long term, and identifying where in the community those services are provided;
- Creating an accountability system to ensure that all young people have access to information and

services that can help them advance toward improved employment and earnings. Case management and MIS systems should be able to account for every young person, so the "hand off" from one service system to another is improved.

- Finding new and more flexible funding streams and new ways to allocate funds effectively. In the current environment, new money will be scarce. This will put pressure on communities to use existing funding more flexibly and efficiently and to coordinate funding streams for maximum impact. Opportunities to explore include: tapping into average daily attendance (ADA) money and Pell Grants to provide greater support to youth in second-chance programs; utilizing welfare grant diversion options to help support work-based learning for young welfare recipients; and loosening locally or state-determined restrictions on current funding sources, including JTPA, welfare, and adult education funds.
- Building the capacity of local institutions and groups to plan and act in a community-wide partnership through: training and facilitation in strategic planning and change management; training and technical assistance in analyzing labor market trends; and development of an integrated MIS capacity.

Priorities for Strategic Grantmaking

This report is written at a time of great change in our nation's politics and policies, particularly in the arena of social policy. The federal welfare system has been replaced by grants to the states built around time limits and work requirements. There have been significant funding cuts in federal employment and training dollars. Given the primacy of budget-balancing on the federal agenda, this trend is unlikely to reverse itself soon. At the same time, responsibility for programs and funding streams is moving from the federal level to the states. While this trend has slowed since the first days of the 1994 Republican capture of Congress, it remains the general direction of public policy.

At the state and local levels, current developments can easily result in reduced resources, heightened turf wars, and less effective services. Yet, there is

also the possibility that a more locally responsive, coherent, and effective system might emerge. The openness of this moment creates an opportunity to: redesign basic operating assumptions that have guided education and employment and training for disadvantaged youth; to think systemically, not just programmatically; and to build a long-term public campaign for youth.

In this environment, simply filling gaps in, or shoring up, existing local programs is an inadequate response. With limited successes to point to on the ground and a rising tide of public cynicism about our nation's ability to intervene effectively on behalf of disadvantaged youth and families, a far more aggressive strategy is needed. What is needed is a long-term, multi-faceted campaign to capture the hearts and minds of America and to build a consensus for bold actions, based on our best knowledge of what works—and what might work better—for our nation's least-advantaged youth and young adults.

Philanthropic organizations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation can play a catalytic leadership role in this campaign. A long-term, strategic foundation initiative can make a significant contribution in four areas:

- Public engagement;
- Public policy;
- Research; and
- The quality of local practice.

Public Engagement

The United States is embroiled today in a public battle over contentious issues directly relevant to the prospects of disadvantaged American youth and families. In recent years, the tide of opinion and policy has turned against those least able to succeed on their own. The impact can be seen in harsher and less generous public policies on crime, welfare, housing, education, and employment and training. Public opinion has been swayed by two ideas: that there is a large group of undeserving poor for whom we need not feel responsible; and that social programs don't work, so we should not "throw money down ratholes." As a result, the constituency and support for government intervention has weakened.

Foundations can play a critically important role in changing the public discourse about poor youth and their prospects, through publications, research programs, convening of public opinion-makers, and a concerted public engagement and media campaign. In particular, foundation grantmaking can help:

- **Change public perceptions about young people:**

Foundations can blunt the dehumanizing of young people by giving them voice and helping their stories get heard. Evidence that counters the charges of "undeserving" by showing hard-working, motivated young people who contribute to their communities and would like a chance to excel can be commissioned and disseminated in different media that influence the public debate.

- **Change the way problems are defined:** This study stresses the importance of defining work preparation in broad terms—and of understanding work preparation as one aspect of the economic, social, and cultural challenge of helping young people succeed. Through their grantmaking, foundations can help redefine the "inner city youth problem." This requires adopting language that focuses more on youth assets and treats youth as whole people, not as a series of problems to be solved. It means promoting an alternative vision that makes gut-level sense to large segments of the public, addresses both their fears of and their hopes for our nation's disconnected youth. To succeed, such an effort may well require transcending the categorical silos of expertise *within* foundations, which tend to reinforce narrow and fragmented problem definitions.

Public Policy

In the public policy arena, the challenges are equally daunting. For years, employment and training policy has been a federal priority while education is historically the province of states and localities. The relations between the two policy fields have been distant and often uneasy. Yet, the past decade has seen some creative efforts to try to bring these worlds into closer alignment, in school-to-career legislation, alternative education for returning dropouts, and small federal demonstration projects designed to bring schools and training

providers in targeted communities into more effective partnerships. More recently, the passage of welfare reform legislation, with its emphasis on work requirements, time limits, and state responsibility, has also forced renewed consideration of how social, economic, and education policy systems should interrelate.

Relations among these different policy areas—education, employment and training, and welfare—are in flux. Efforts to improve the integration of the education and training systems may be slowed or reversed by demands on training institutions from the welfare system—or welfare reform may lead, over time, to further convergence. How these policy shifts will play out remains to be seen. The extent to which they will be linked to pro-urban economic development and housing policies is also in question. In the next year, federal lawmakers will rewrite many important pieces of legislation, including the employment and training, higher education, adult education, and vocational education acts. Welfare reform may be revisited. The Empowerment Zone/Enterprising Communities effort is likely to remain the focus for federal urban investments and to be the vehicle for place-based approaches to revitalization. In the process, there will be opportunities for encouraging more comprehensive and less categorical approaches—though there will be countervailing pressures as well. As the locus of implementation and policy activity will continue to swing toward the states, the ability of localities to innovate and to serve urban youth better will depend significantly upon state level guidance, resources, and restrictions.

In light of this new policy reality, foundations can play an important role in helping to protect promising policy innovations of the past and to explore new directions for the future. Toward this end, foundations should:

- **Promote a compelling vision and rationale for a national role:** As in any effort to change direction in large systems, local innovation must be encouraged and nurtured by strong leadership at a national level. A risk in this period of weakening federal role is the loss of a national perspective assertive and influential enough to channel

policy in specific directions. In a field where categorical, particularist interests often dominate and compete, a national vision that can guide more comprehensive policy making is needed. This vision should be constructed around basic principles regarding: the role of government; the respective roles of federal, state and local levels of government; the responsibilities of the private sector and of individuals; and a commitment to solutions that go beyond marginal demonstrations to help significant numbers of disadvantaged youth succeed; a commitment to less fragmented approaches to addressing young people's work preparation needs. Foundations can generate opportunities and venues for the development and refinement of this vision through strategic grants to national organizations.

- **Create a forum for developing a new policy consensus:** While the youth field may have arrived at a general consensus on promising and effective practices, the policy community more broadly has not, particularly in federal and state legislatures. A national vision will not emerge or be sustained without significant debate, deliberation, and consensus-building. Foundations can assist in this campaign by creating and sustaining a national forum that becomes a safe environment for hammering out such a new consensus. This forum could consciously try to identify areas of agreement across the political spectrum and to promote constructive debate, based on assessment of the evidence, on views and strategies where little consensus exists. When policymakers at the federal and state levels look for proactive approaches to youth problems, such a forum could be ready to take a lead role in setting the agenda for the "next wave" of youth policy.
- **Focus on state policy:** In the coming years, states will be the battlefield in social policy debates relevant to cities and their young people. The variation in state commitment, resource allocations, and program designs will be wide. Some states will demonstrate limited ability and commitment to innovation—and their efforts will consist largely of turf battles. But some states will be innovators. Some of these states will pursue

promising reform strategies; others will adopt policies that put disadvantaged populations at greater risk. Foundations need to help the best local practitioners—and political leaders—understand what is happening in their states and how state policy can be influenced in this new environment. As a new national system begins to emerge, based on a combination of local practice and state and local policies, foundations can help promote locally designed, state-managed systems that are less fragmented, more comprehensive, and driven more by the needs of young people than by categorically-funded organizations or agencies. This will require greater attention in grant strategies to state and regional policy actors, the institutions that exist to mediate competing visions and priorities, and ways to help community-level activists can influence state and regional policies and resource allocation decisions.

- **Insist that foundation funds continue to be used as leverage for innovation and improvement, not as a substitute for base support from the public sector.** The foundation community's resources cannot substitute for federal dollars. If they try to fill the gap, foundations will find themselves having to make impossible choices among competing priorities. And their effectiveness as "venture capitalists" for change will be compromised.
- **Form strategic alliances with other foundations:** A number of national foundations are committed to the broad agenda of disadvantaged youth and their futures; but they tend toward different specializations. The Kellogg Foundation has embarked on a major initiative on African-American males; the Pew Charitable Trusts has promoted employer involvement in school-based efforts; the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has emphasized leadership development in youth-serving organizations; the Ford Foundation targets urban poverty. In an era of scarce public and private resources, it is increasingly important for foundations to work with each other, making strategic alliances that enable them to advance their particular priorities while strengthening the efforts of other funders.

Research on Practice and Policy

As this study stresses, much still remains unknown about which policies and practices are most effective for different populations. Research has been better at identifying what doesn't work than what does. And evidence of effectiveness in one or a few locations does not guarantee success when a program tries to replicate at scale. As reform strategies try to encourage systemic changes across whole communities and greater integration among policy fields, the lack of solid research that can inform these experiments is striking.

Yet, if our efforts are to evolve and succeed, knowledge development is critically important. To make credible arguments to the public, policymakers, or even within the youth service field, better definitions of success are needed, as are clearer explanations for why some interventions are more successful than others. Foundations can promote new knowledge development—and better use of existing research—to improve program design and implementation, assess community-level changes, and monitor the effects of policy on particular populations.

- **Program-level outcomes:** Public debate has been hampered by the lack of convincing research on effective practices and on impacts. We need to know more about the impacts—and cost-effectiveness—of different program models. At the same time, more field-based research on what makes some programs succeed and others not is also critically important. We need to learn more about design and implementation challenges of work preparation strategies that demand higher standards, deeper relations with other economic and social institutions and systems, and an emphasis on both work preparation and youth development. In this study, we have identified a general consensus on key principles and design elements for effective programs. But the devil really is in the details. Which elements are most likely to yield improved outcomes? What guidance can research give to practitioners "in the trenches" as they try to build and strengthen their programs?
- **Community-level change:** In addition, too little is known about the best ways to organize effective

community-level collaboratives. Do certain governance structures work better than others? Do certain kinds of intermediary organizations have a better chance of reaching out across constituencies—and across service delivery systems?

Assessing the impacts of community-wide change strategies has become an important topic in evaluation research. It is not that easy to identify quantitative measures of improved community well-being and prospects—or to collect the relevant data. Here, too, both quantitative and qualitative research are needed, so that the field can assess the outcomes of different initiatives and also learn from implementation challenges and how they are addressed.

- **Policy innovations:** Finally, as policy changes work their way through the federal, state, and local systems, it will be critically important to document and assess their impacts. Beginning with welfare reform and extending into other arenas of social policy, the federal government is reallocating responsibilities, accountability, and funding patterns. What impacts will these changes have on communities, their work preparation strategies, and their young people? As state experimentation proliferates, it will be important to look at the policies and practices that emerge—and how state and local efforts can best be designed to contribute to quality efforts that reach significant numbers of young people.

The Quality and Impact of Local Practice

In the end, it is at the community level where individuals' lives are affected by the evolution of policy and practice. For the individual, only local practice matters. The key questions are ones like these: If I try hard, will anybody be able to help me get a job? Will this case worker help me or give me the run-around? Where can I get help finding child care?

At the local level, foundations must continue to encourage and promote "visions of the possible" that can motivate innovators across the country and provide evidence for policymakers that new approaches can work. These facts on the ground must be of two kinds: programmatic and systemic.

Program support: Foundations should act as venture capitalists for innovative programs that

embody the principles laid out in this study, particularly those that are well-managed and have strong leadership. Foundations should encourage efforts that define skill-development approaches broadly and that help disadvantaged youth master the "new basic skills." They should also promote efforts to strengthen the links between supply and demand side approaches to addressing youth employment and earnings. Work preparation efforts that are integrated with job creation and job access approaches—such as training programs tied to community revitalization efforts or linked to the city's economic development initiatives—deserve special support. Areas where foundation support can be particularly useful include: staff development, leadership training, principles of quality management, peer learning among similar efforts within a community or more nationally, and support for intermediaries that can link education and training providers with employers or improve the links between community-based organizations serving out-of-school youth and more mainstream community institutions.

System-building: Foundations should also continue to experiment with systemic approaches to helping youth succeed. To reach any significant scale and to move beyond "boutique" programs, localities will need help designing mechanisms for effective collaboration and for more comprehensive revitalization strategies. While many communities may flounder in the new policy environment, the most visionary and well-organized can become laboratories for the design and implementation of workforce preparation systems that break out of the categorical boxes that have long defined—and constrained—youth programs. These lead communities will be in a position to influence the thinking and decisions of state and federal policymakers. National foundations can help these efforts by supporting and funding: the forums that become community planning mechanisms; the organizing required to bring community constituencies together; the staff development needed to manage these efforts well; the strategic thinking that can leverage state and federal resources more effectively; and the opportunities for reflection on progress and challenges, in a given community and across similar efforts nationally.

Conclusion: The Need for a Long-Term Commitment

This report has argued that for youth policy and programming to be more effective in preparing our most at-risk urban youth and young adults for productive careers and lives, new and more ambitious approaches will be needed. Youth policy has suffered from an overemphasis on skill and attitude deficiencies of individuals to the exclusion of approaches designed to address other critically important barriers to success. This includes the landscape of opportunity that faces individuals as they choose their futures (i.e., a combination of local economic conditions, the attitudes and behaviors of local employers, the strength of family and neighborhood fabric, and the capacity and ability of youth-serving institutions to reach young people and to work together). New approaches will be more likely to succeed if they are able to link efforts to improve the landscape of opportunity with efforts to help individual young people be better prepared to take advantage of those opportunities.

This new agenda requires changes in the way skill-development efforts are designed and implemented as well as changes in the relationship of those efforts to other urban and youth policy interventions.

Throughout this study, we have pointed to promising strategies that can guide local efforts, as well as policy innovations that can encourage local improvements. In the prior section of this chapter, we outlined roles for funders interested in promoting more comprehensive, cross-system collaborations.

The message that emerges most clearly from this study is that in order to achieve the ambitious agenda proposed here, a long-term commitment to our nation's most at-risk youth will be needed. And this commitment must be patient kind. We are at a low ebb in the cycle of public commitment and trust in social policy. Moreover, there are no systemic reform blueprints to follow, no proven vehicles for

community collaboration, cross-system coordination, or institutionalizing new relationships among education, employment and training, and economic development systems.

To move from marginal successes to serious scale and impact on our cities and their youth will take a long period of patient experimentation with different ways of moving forward. There are likely to be many disappointments and even outright failures as new and ambitious approaches are designed, tested, and implemented. At the same time, an extended period of public engagement and consensus-building around the need for new youth work preparation strategies is needed, one which can change public perceptions and the climate within which policy is made and programs operate.

It will be a long journey from where we are today to a time when policy and practice in the preparation of disadvantaged urban youth for labor market success looks like the vision laid out above. Yet, as this report emphasizes, the map toward that future is becoming increasingly clear—and priority targets of opportunity are relatively easy to identify.

For national funders such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the challenge will be how to promote activities at local, state, and national levels that can: improve the climate for innovation; accelerate movement in promising directions; monitor and assess the effects of those strategies; and sustain public commitment and patience long enough to allow practitioners to experiment, succeed and fail, and improve continuously. This is a significant challenge; but national funders are in a position to be catalysts for just this kind of campaign. It is our hope that this report will be helpful to the Casey Foundation and other funders as they revisit and refine their grantmaking priorities in the area of work preparation for disadvantaged urban youth and young adults.

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Project Site Visits

Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)—Boston
Asian Neighborhood Design—San Francisco
Center for Employment and Training—San Jose, Baltimore
City Year—Boston
Cleveland Works—Cleveland
The CLUB—Boston
Community Builders in Partnership
 (includes a YouthBuild and an AmeriCorps program)—Baltimore
Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program—New York City
Education for Employment Office, Philadelphia Public Schools—Philadelphia
Fund for the City of New York—New York City
Jobs for Youth—Boston
Manhattan Valley—New York City
Maritime Institute—Baltimore
OICs of America—Philadelphia
Project ProTech—Boston
Rebuild LA—Los Angeles
Rheedlen Center for Children and Youth—New York City
Rindge School of Technical Arts—Cambridge
Roosevelt Renaissance 2000—Portland, Oregon
STRIVE—New York City
Vocational Fund—New York City
Walks of Life—New York City
Young Adult Learning Academy (YALA)—New York City
Youth Action Program—New York City
Youth Fair Chance—The Bronx, New York City
Youth Opportunities Unlimited—Cleveland
YouthBuild—Baltimore, Boston

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